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LIGHT FROM  
THE OLD LAMP



REV. J. JACKSON WRAY.







LIGHT FROM THE OLD LAMP.

**Ballantyne Press**

**BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO  
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LIGHT  
FROM THE OLD LAMP.

*HOMESPUN HOMILIES.*

BY

J. JACKSON WRAY,

AUTHOR OF

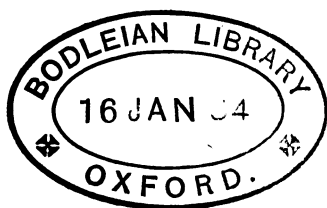
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# LIGHT FROM THE OLD LAMP.



## I.

### *A NOBLE CHARACTER.*

“Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.”—1 KINGS xviii. 3.

OBADIAH “feared the Lord.” That is to say, he was loyal to the Lord; the law of God was the rule of his life. He feared to sin; kept watch over his heart, held guard on his lips, and followed the commandments of the Most High. To him his God was king, and he would not disobey. To him God was friend and father, and gratitude and love begot a fear of grieving or offending Him.

Obadiah “feared the Lord” from his youth. That is to say, this tree of righteousness, called Obadiah, was strong, widespread, and beautiful, bending with the fruits of goodness, because he was planted in the garden of grace when he was a sapling, a tender plant, whose childhood was given to the love and service of his God. He

A

who begins well, shall prosper well; he who prospers well, shall end well; he who ends well, shall flourish for ever in the evergreen gardens of God. Let us look at this noble and godly character, Obadiah the man; and remember that all his goodness began to grow in Obadiah the boy.

“Be good, young folks, and let who will be clever;  
Do noble things, not dream them all day long;  
And so make life, death, and the vast for ever,  
One grand, sweet song.”

Obadiah's goodness makes us wonder. He lived in an age and in a country when and where goodness was sadly scarce. The idolatries of the heathen had come to prevail everywhere, not only in worship, but in all the filthy abominations connected therewith. It is still more wonderful that Obadiah should live in the court of the wicked King Ahab and the disgraceful Queen Jezebel. Vile as the land was, the court was worse, a lawless place of shameless crime, without fear of God or regard of man. And yet “Obadiah feared the Lord!”

The wonder is that King Ahab would have this man by him, much more that he should commit the highest office and the most important trust into his hands. Obadiah's presence must have been a standing rebuke to the selfish and sensual king; and his reproving look or word

must have been as a thorn in Ahab's side. How could his majesty endure him? How was it that my lady Jezebel—who generally gave a long rope and a short shrift to those who stood, like Naboth, in her way—did not get rid of such a kill joy from before her painted face, as this good man Obadiah? Because they knew when they were well off. Because they could not afford to lose so trusty and capable a servant. Because among all the fawning courtiers who juggled the king, flattered Jezebel, and bowed the knee to Baal, there was not a man to replace him if he were dismissed. Young men! young women! you who hold situations in anybody's employ, Hark you! Make yourselves of value to your masters. By diligence, application, integrity, and obliging manners, make yourself necessary to those who pay you salary or wage. You are permitted to make the best of both worlds, and the "man that fears the Lord greatly" is the likeliest man to do it.

If I wonder that Ahab would have him about him, I wonder more that Obadiah was willing to stay. The corrupt atmosphere of Ahab's shameless court must have been a rank offence to him. His disposition was the same as David's, when he said, "I hate them that hate Thee; yea, I hate them," that is, their course and character, "with perfect hatred." What a repulsive busi-



ness it must have been to touch the pitch of such iniquity ; and what a grief of heart to witness the gross dishonour to his God ! You are quite sure, too, that beautiful tigress, that fascinating viper, Jezebel, would like to have torn him to pieces or stung him to death for his contempt of Baal. I have no doubt she made it very hot for him at times, and as little doubt that the fawning spaniels round the throne snapped and barked at him, and occasionally made their teeth meet in his flesh. All this would certainly make Obadiah envy the wings of a dove, or covet a cottage in a wilderness, far from such a "madding crowd's ignoble strife." Then why did he not go ? The Prophet Elijah, wandering alone among the glens of Thisbe, or the rocks of Horeb, or by the waters of Cherith, or the coasts of Sidon, would be glad, poor outlaw, of a little congenial company. Why doesn't Obadiah join him ? Because "he feared the Lord greatly ;" and both patriotism and religion, loyalty to the interests of his country and the honour of his God, bound him to his post.

Nehemiah had the walls of Jerusalem to rebuild. But Sanballat the Moabite, Tobias the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, came down on him like ravening wolves. "Flee into the temple and shut the doors, for they will surely slay thee !" said his trem-

bling friends. And Nehemiah said, "Should such a man as I flee? Who is there, that being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Flee, sentinel, from thy post! Thy life's in danger; the east wind chills thy marrow, and the lonely night is dark! Nay, he will keep watch and ward until his hour is come, unless the fierce wind freeze his vitals, or he fall upon his narrow beat with a bullet through his heart. Flee, guardian of the lighthouse! Already the storm rides rampant over raging waves, and the tall shaft on which thou standest rocks and reels beneath its thunderous blows! Nay, that guiding light shall flash its merciful message to the gallant ships, until his comrade takes the duty, unless the lighthouse crashes down before the storm; then its ruins shall be the brave man's monument, and the winds and waves shall chant a monody in honour of the martyr to duty, of fidelity to the death! No, Obadiah cannot flee. He is fastened to the helm, and though lashed by the storm whip, dashed by the surges, now tossed on the billows, now gulfed in the deep, his grip is on the tiller, and his eye is on his God. Read ye this lesson! Whatsoever your place or lot; whatsoever the exposure to test or trial; howsoever trying to the temper, fretting to the mind, and opposite to the will,—be assured of

God and your conscience that you have *business* there, and then—

“One of the chivalry of Christ,  
By Him be taught to stand,  
With rootage like the palm,  
Amid maddest whirl of sand.”

‘Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.’

I find still further cause for wonder, in that the goodness of Obadiah had been maintained during his residence in the court of King Ahab. Despite the influence of the king, the intrigues of the queen, the plots and pleasings, the traps and threats of courtiers, the dominating worship of Baal, whose signs and symbols were everywhere, Obadiah still walked in the fear of the Lord! I marvel at it. I know what comes to a statue of white marble exposed to the corrosive fogs of London. I know what happens to the rippling music and the silver beauty of the summer brook when it falls into the turbid river rolling its dull waters in sullen silence to the sea. I know the fate of May flowers when the blast of the east winds blow a malison on their beauty. Alas, alas! I know, too, by sad experience, what comes to human hearts and consciences when fierce and fiery, or subtle and winsome temptations ply their evil power. But this palace governor defies alike the blandish-

ments of beauty, the example of royalty, the power of majorities, all the pressure brought upon him by Baal and Baalzebub. Everybody around him may toady the king, flatter the queen, cheat each other, serve the devil and shout for Baal; this man, this one man Obadiah, "feared the Lord." He shone like a solitary star in a murky midnight sky. He bloomed like a lily in a bed of thorns. I remember once, while resident on the western coast of Africa, crossing a barren tract of country, when a strange vision came before my eyes. I saw a fair and stately palm-tree springing from the desert sand; its graceful shaft rising to a height of near a hundred feet, crested with a coronet of leafy splendour, and rich with clusters of ripening fruit. All around it was stunted brushwood and dwarfish thorn. It stood alone, a solitary magnificence, a concentrated glory. Even so did Obadiah stand, like a cedar of Lebanon amid brambles, God's true freeman amid a horde of slaves! Look on this picture, men and women, young and old. 'Tis a brave sight, my masters; and has brave, bright lessons in it for us all!

Let me quote a sentence or two from that thoroughly manly, because thoroughly godly teacher of truth, Charles Kingsley: "It is a painful fact, but there is no denying it, that the

mass of men are the tools of circumstances; thistle-down on the breeze, straw on the river, their course is shaped for them by the currents and eddies of the stream of life; but this is only in proportion as they are *things*, not true men and women. Man was meant to be not the *slave*, but the *master* of circumstances; and in proportion as he gets back the spirit of manliness, which is self-sacrifice, love, loyalty to a God above himself, so far will he rise above circumstances and wield them at his will." These be good words.

Do you ask where and how you can get this lapsed and forgotten inspiration? I answer, by sitting at the feet of Him who is the pattern Man, the model Teacher, the atoning God, even Jesus.

The goodness of Obadiah gives me further cause for wonder in that it grew and ripened under unfavourable treatment.

It is said of him, that he "feared the Lord from his youth." The guiding principle of his whole career was the fear of God. There is no doubt that his religion met with some shrewd blows and sore bruises as his beard grew; and that as he advanced to mature manhood, the world, the flesh, and the devil, hit both hard and often at the man who would be good in spite of them. But when he gets promoted to the very

highest office in the king's household, and can flourish and ruffle it with the best of them; when he can coin gold by lying, swim in sensual pleasures by yielding, win rank and honour by flattering, and bask in the smile of beauty and royalty by cringing; and when, on the other hand, loyalty to God will bring him the hate of the vile, the sneers of the malignant, and it may be the loss of his office, the frown of King Ahab, and from Queen Jezebel the assassin's dagger or the hangman's rope! Then what? Surely other hopes and fears will supersede the fear of the Lord. He may keep some ragged remnants of his religion; some fitful show of devotion, but his piety will be a diminishing quantity, like the sand in the hour-glass, or the snow-wreath in the sun.

What says the book?—now that Obadiah is middle-aged, and his locks are turning grey?—now that he is a long-established dweller under the court patronage of this godless king; now that all the moral mischief may be supposed to have been done? “Now Obadiah feared the Lord *greatly*.” Instead of descending a valley, he has been climbing the hill. Instead of lapsing into silence with broken strings, his life-harp vibrates with richer melody and a holier psalm. Instead of sinking in shadow down the blurred and murky west, his sun has climbed in glory

to the throne of noon ! Let us learn the sublime and noble lesson. The way of duty is not only the way of safety, but it is the way to more perfect goodness and increasing strength. It is rough at times, and thorns and briars pierce the feet, but every step is victory and every thorn-point has its compensation in the added lustre of our moral crown. A cloud of trouble brings a cargo of blessing, and the bigger the blessing the blacker it looks. The bridge sets more firmly for the heavy loads that over-pass it, and the moral muscles of the good man develop strength by test and trial. The prison chains of Joseph, and his strong temptation, led right onward to high exaltation and Pharaoh's chain of gold.

I find further cause for wonder in Obadiah's simple faith in the supernatural, the miracle-working power of God. A grievous drought had passed over the land like the blast of a simoon, and death, astride the pale horse, had dealt havoc through the land on man and beast. Ahab and Obadiah set off on a tour, this way and that, through all the country in search of unexhausted stream or fount; that haply they might keep a remnant of the cattle still alive. On his way Obadiah met Elijah the prophet of the Lord. "Go, tell the king," said the stalwart and hairy Tishbite, "Behold, Elijah is here."

“Nay,” said Obadiah, “Ahab has hunted for thee high and low to kill thee, that at the ebbing of thy blood the wells and rivers may flow again. If I send him here, the Spirit of the Lord will carry thee away, and the king will slay me.”

Poor superstitious, old-fashioned, simple-hearted Obadiah! What! has he then forgotten that the hoary religion of his fathers is now demonstrated to be an old wife's fable? Is he not aware that royalty and rank have disavowed the foolish faith; that neither priest nor Levite can be found to unroll the law or swing the censer, and to burn a sin-offering would extort the great man's laughter and the people's scorn? Does he forget that Jehovah has been discrowned, and that in presence of all-conquering Baal there are none so poor as to do Him reverence; that the temples of Baal, the altars of Baal, the golden calves of Jeroboam, are in full swing in the groves and high places and almost under every green tree? And yet the simple soul, palace governor though he be, thinks that Elijah can be suddenly spirited away; that the laws of nature can be tampered with, gravitation suspended, and a miracle can be wrought by a fancied Deity whom every one regards as an exploded myth! To faithful, trustful, Heaven-taught Obadiah, despite of scepticism, infidelity, and Baalim, the Lord Jehovah lived and ruled!



and though no lightnings scorched the loud blasphemers, though no earthquake swallowed up the apostate king and his debased and abominable crew, Obadiah knew that the Lord reigneth, if in all but tireless patience, yet in awful omnipotence of power.

We, too, live in perilous times. The faith of many has grown feeble and the love of many hath waxed cold. Unbelief hath seized in his icy grip much of the intellect and scholarship of our time. Infidelity seeks a seat among our senators, and the suspicious doubt that tacitly denies, erects its subtle head even in the pulpits and on the platforms of the holy place. Science, who, in her own fair robes, is fair as the light and beautiful as the morning, has been made to don the armour and wield the weapons of the sceptic and to fight against the gospel-winged angel of God. Jezebel is in high repute to-day, wears purple and fine linen and fares sumptuously and sensually every day. The temples of Baal rear their commanding fronts on every side; and his idols of every name and in every niche command the worship of the multitude who forget God. The prophetic word as to a wide-spread apostasy, the forerunner of our Lord's appearing, seems to be fulfilling, to chill the air and gloom the sky. Wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes and tempests, strifes and passions

of men upheaving society, make the wise man ponder and the good man hope and fear. Men say, with the light laughter of scorn, "Where is the promise of His coming? For all things continue as they were." As they did in Obadiah's days, so they do in ours. Happy they who in the crisis, whenever it may come, shall have Obadiah's faith! Happy shall be the seven thousand loyal hearts who bow no knee to Baal! Happy they, happy now, happy always, who shall welcome without fear the descending sign of fire, and shout the familiar and eternal truth, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God!"

I find still another wonder, still another lesson in the piety of Obadiah: his noble deeds of kindness to others at great cost and danger to himself. At the very height of the fierce persecution of the prophets and teachers of the law of the Lord, when Jezebel was exceeding mad against them, and vowed that every man of them should either bow the knee to the golden calves and swear by the name of Baal or fall a prey to the dagger and the knife, Obadiah hid one hundred of them in two caves, and kept them well supplied with food and drink until they could find refuge in another land. It would not have been unnatural if Obadiah, considering the post he held and the risk he ran, had left them

to their fate. It would not have been hard to find plausible reasons and passable excuses for so "taking care of number one." But the man whose godliness is of a manly and noble order, always brackets number two with number one; and so this man that "feared the Lord" did not fear even the bloody-minded Jezebel one whit where a brother's interests were in question, but provided him with shelter and with bread at the desperate hazard of his life. Your worldly-wise man is often not averse to kindly deeds, and has his stock of charitable sympathies; but these but rarely involve self-sacrifice, and still more rarely the peril of such a fate as this. Oh, ye servants of the living God! ye followers of Jesus; you whose glorious Pattern did drink the cup of bitterness and drained its uttermost dregs for His poor human brotherhood! Heed the holy, noble lesson, and at willing cost and pains and labour, exhibit a tireless love and tenderness to the sad, the needy, and the poor. In the great audit which is coming to us all, the grandest, richest heritage of glory shall be theirs who hear the Master say, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

I have sought to portray that noble character, a "man who fears the Lord greatly;" his inner motive, his divine principle, his social value, his

unflinching fidelity, his staunch integrity, his mastery of circumstance, his simple and unassailable faith in God, his tender charity and love. It is the noblest standard of a man, the grandest strength of a nation, the most steadfast basis for the hope of the world's regeneration, and he who attains to it shall take his eternal station hard by the throne of God. Never were sterling, God-fearing men and women more wanted than to-day. Shams, hypocrisies, and counterfeits are everywhere, and eat as doth a canker the vital forces of society. In the churches, weak-kneed Christians, gelatinous professors, molluscous members, wavering, uncertain disciples, are trailing the bright banner of Christ in the mud and mire; and as one watches the gathering forces of Antichrist and the on-coming of the serried ranks of materialism, scepticism, and popular no-faith, one is inclined to sigh,

“Of the three hundred grand but three  
To make a new Thermopylæ.”

“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

## II.

*"BETTER THAN GOLD."*

"How much better is it to get wisdom than gold."—PROV. xvi. 16.

BETTER than gold! But gold is good, very good, and he who would put forward with success the far higher worth of wisdom, had better not begin his argument by putting too low an estimate on gold. Solomon the wise is continually comparing wisdom with gold, fine gold, much fine gold, and the comparison implies that the "yellow dross," as it is called, was among his most valued possessions. One of the rivers that watered the land of Eden was made to flow through the "land of Havilah, where there is gold, and the gold of that land," say the very first pages of the Bible, "is good."

On reading over the Divine directions given to Moses for the construction of the sacred ark and its tabernacle, and for the service of the altar and the habit of the priests, I am surprised to see how largely they have to do with gold. Here are rings of gold, staves of gold, tassels of

gold. Here are golden ephods, golden girdles, chains, bells, and breastplates, and even golden cherubim and a golden altar. In the furniture of Solomon's temple, gold is still further brought to the front, and even the house itself was overlaid with pure gold, so that it must have been a far more gorgeous glory than that oft-quoted golden image which Nebuchadnezzar did set up. "The gold of Sheba" is one of the gifts the Messiah is to receive, according to prophetic song. Gold is one of the promises of God to His emancipated people: "for brass I will bring gold;" and in the mystic and marvelous visions of the Apocalypse, the golden vessels, trumpets, vials, crowns, censers, and what not, return in tenfold number and force. Gold is beautiful; brightly burnished, it is the most brilliant of all adornments, and there is little wonder that royalty, from the crown, sceptre, and regalia of Queen Victoria to the barbaric ear-rings, nose-rings, anklets and shield of the King of Ashanti, should make parade and pomp by the chief aid of gleaming gold.

Gold is precious; when we remember all the straits and struggles it can save us from; when we think of all the ease, comfort, and enjoyment it can bring to us and ours, it cannot be denied that gold is good; and the moral teacher who speaks hard things against it,

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and pooh-poohs its usefulness, is only confirming those he seeks to impress in the idea that religion is the thing for parsons, recluses, and hermits, but that it won't do for this work-a-day world at all. The result of this everlasting pulpit harping on the worthlessness of gold is visible in the old song,—

“The good may scorn and the priest may laugh  
At him that worships the golden calf;  
But depend upon it, a golden egg  
Is better than having to borrow or beg.  
You may say what you will, in life's sunniest day,  
There's nothing like gold for the world's highway.  
The wise may sneer and the pious laugh  
At him who worships the golden calf,  
But be sure a guinea or two in store  
Is better than having the wolf at the door.  
’Tis gold that brings honour, respect, and friends;  
*Want* it, and quickly their friendship ends.  
For, say what you will, in life's stormiest day,  
There's nothing like gold for the world's highway.”

Now, I beg to say, that I do *not* preach against “a golden egg,” and that I very strongly approve of the “guineas in store” within reasonable limits, but that is no “worship of the golden calf” at all, but a religious duty, binding on the conscience of every man who wants to do rightly by himself, his family, his neighbour, and his God—for all these have a claim upon his guineas when they come.

One of the most powerful parables of our Lord turns on some money which was idly hidden,

instead of being turned over in trade that it might grow by diligence and fair dealing. Gold is full of service—has in it wondrous potencies for smoothing life-travel, lightening burdens, bringing comforts, cheering the poor, helping the needy, and glorifying God. All the gold you can get by honest labour, by conscientious tact and skill, by superior knowledge, *get it*, my friend, and when it is gotten spend it carefully, store it prudently, use it charitably, sanctify it religiously, and thou shalt find that gold is good.

Ill-gotten gold, my friend, will ultimately burn both your fingers and your pocket—ay, and scar the soul, too, with a brand that only heaven can wash away. Achan's wedge of gold was followed by the stones of execution. Gehazi's leprosy gives equal warning; and you must not forget that it was *money* that betrayed the Saviour, and choked out the guilty soul of Judas from rope and beam. Gold, like fire, is a good servant but a bad master; it can be either a fiend from the nethermost dark, or an angel of blessing, according to the spirit in which you seek it, the fashion in which you get it, and the way in which you use it. If "Mammon" be a god, he is a prince among the devils; but if money be a trust, a stewardship held of God, that very mammon, with its yellow



gleam and sonorous chink, will crowd the gates of paradise with friends to greet you into everlasting habitation !

Yes, gold is *good*. It can do much for you. It can work wonders on your behalf. It can place all the enjoyments of nature, the triumphs of art, the aptitudes of science, and the ordinary pleasures of life at your disposal. A golden key can unlock most doors for you in this world. "Money answereth all things," says Solomon, and although that must be taken with a prodigious grain of salt, it is very largely true, as he says, "of the things which are under the sun." Surely I have permitted gold to say enough for itself ; but, accepting for the moment this high standard, without waiting to question it as to adulteration and alloy, I stand up, before all its power and glitter and glory, and say, "*How much better is it to get wisdom than gold !*"

I need not stay to define the term *wisdom*, as it is to be understood in this book, further than this, that both Solomon and Paul call Christ the Saviour by this name. "I, Wisdom," says the former, "was with God, or ever the world was, as one brought up with Him. I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." The apostle calls Him "the wisdom of God," and Jesus Himself applies the title to Himself. "Wisdom," says He, "is justified of her

children." The same great Teacher, too, calls the Scriptures *wisdom*, and they who make piety their chief concern He calls *wise*. *To know Christ, then, in the heart as a Saviour, in the mind as a Teacher, in the life as a Pattern, and in all things as a King—this is wisdom.* It is the fear of the Lord, the love of His law, faith in His cross, the power of His spirit, the hope in His word. "The fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." This is better than gold. So much better that Solomon does not seek for comparisons; *that* would be utterly in vain; but as he watches the fitful flicker of the golden flame burning itself away on the altar of wealth, he turns his eyes upward towards the Sun of Righteousness which floods the soul through time and eternity with grace and glory, and exclaims, with full heart and lifted hands, "*How much better is wisdom than gold!*" Let us test it and see.

Gold *can* but be an external possession—a mere accessory of life. You may apply and appropriate it to ornament or use. It may alleviate your circumstances, may brighten your lot, may gratify the senses, and surround you with physical good. But you cannot assimilate it, cannot embody it in your being, cannot make it more than nominally your own. And as it can

provide you with nothing that does not come to you through the avenues of the senses, its benefits, whatever they are, grow ever weaker and fewer as the physical powers grow dull and jaded and the senses decline and decay. What are all its lustre and brightness to the filmy vision and the dimming eye? What are all its stringed music or enchanting song to the dull, deaf ear of infirmity and age? What are its banquets, confections, and baked meats to the difficult digestion, the palled appetite, and the palate devoid of taste.

Nay, all the luxuries which gold can bring do all the sooner exhaust the senses and invite their fate. The bright green ivy grows *about* the tree, but is not *of* the tree; it adorns and shields and beautifies it, but at the same time it lowers its strength, drains its forces, exhausts its vital energies, and hastens its decay. So gold can only compensate for its fast-lessening advantages by aiding in the wear and tear of the human-life tree, and surviving its final fall. But, on the other hand, Wisdom, the power of religion, is *not* external, although it affects all surrounding circumstances for good. It is in the heart, the soul, the life, the man, and by its salutary elixir, its Divine vitality maintains, sustains, develops, inspires, and blesses, so that though the outward man may perish, the inward

man is renewed day by day. Gold can dip its buckets into this world's reservoirs and fill them sparkling to the brim. It can lift the full cup to its owner's eager lip, and let him taste whatsoever of sweet those cisterns contain; but there comes a time when the reservoir is corrupted, or the bucket is stolen, or the cistern is broken, or the cup is lost, or the lips refuse the draught! THEN, ALAS, POOR SOUL!

But *Wisdom* is a well, a fountain, in the Christian's soul. It is fed by secret channels direct from the river of life, clear as crystal, which proceedeth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The joy of the Lord is his strength, the strength of the Lord is his joy; and filled from that perennial fount of good, he lives, thrives, rejoices, utterly independent of the lack of gold. The good man, by reason of his inner wealth, can stand up amidst sterile fields, barren orchards, rifled stalls, and empty barns, and say, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive may fail; the fields may yield no meat; the flock may be cut off from the fold; and though there be no herds in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!"

Here, then, I take my stand. Gold may be with me, grace shall be in me, wealth may be

about me, wisdom shall be of me, not an endowment, but an imbuement. Gold is but lent to me, but God's mercy and favour are eternally MINE! *How much better is it to get wisdom than gold!* Better! Right through the ages, God's best and dearest, happiest and noblest, have been rich in wisdom and poor in gold. Gold needs anxious guarding amid all the moth and rust and thieves of time; and oft all watching is of no avail. Wisdom will guard thee right safely, and the Bank of Providence will guard thy gold as well. Gold is hard to get, heavy to carry, and bad to hold! Wisdom comes a free gift, lies light on the heart, and nestles in sweet content, with no desire to go. Gold is ever a moral danger, a strong temptation, and its evil influence grows as fast as the guineas grow. But wisdom strengthens the manliness, develops goodness, and that all the faster and fairer as the wealth of God rolls in! Gold grows less in the spending and dwindles in distribution; wisdom multiplies in imparting, and grows by giving. Gold cannot get wisdom; but wisdom can get both grace and gold, and can get, too, more real treasure and gladness out of the gold than those who get it for its own sake! Gold cannot cure the heart-ache, comfort the conscience, soothe the pangs of bereavement, or find a cure for sad hearts; but the wisdom of Jesus is a balsam for

sorrow, a balm for the soul, a medicine for grief, a specific for care. Gold cannot bribe that grim tyrant death, nor buy the keys of the grave, nor disarm the final assize of its terrors, nor open the gates of the Halls of Light. But wisdom makes death the bright angel of God; wisdom makes the grave a restful-bed fragrant with the slumbers of Christ; wisdom shows its heaven-signed passport at the bar, and passes the portals of paradise amid the songs of the angels of bliss. Then shall begin the Christian's golden age. With the crown of gold on his radiant brow, he shall sweep the strings of his golden harp, and make melody in the golden light that shines for ever on the hills of God! *How much better is it to get wisdom than gold!*

Let me speak to the aged and to all who have passed the noon of life. Friend! there is not much likelihood that much of gold will come to thee now. Gold has not much respect for failing fingers and declining powers. It refuses to come at their call. But wisdom, thank God, is still at thy disposal, and thy Saviour proffers still, and now, to invest thee with the blood-bought riches of His grace! Let me speak to those who are fast attaining the meridian. Friend! at the most daring computation, half thy life is gone. I know not whether thou hast gained, art gaining, the coveted meed of gold;

but this I know, in the light of eternity it matters to thee not one jot whether or no. Hast thou wisdom? I pray thee bend thy strong will, ripe powers, and mature experience to *this*! With all thy getting, hie thee to Jesus, and get a wise and understanding heart! Let me speak to the young. Your life lies fair before you, and God forbid that I should say a word to damp your ardour or to cloud your sky. My heart and prayer are with you in all your hopes and aims. But I pray you put the best thing first. Wisdom is better than gold. Wisdom will make you rich and happy if you never get any gold. Wisdom will guide and help and strengthen you in the getting of gold, and if in life's struggles you should fail and fall, without the gold, wisdom hath wings which will bear you up, from the battle and the dark, up to the calm, bright treasure-land on high. Let me say a word to the poor. Like my Master, I would ever preach the gospel to the poor. Brother of the hard hand and harder fare, sister of the mean dwelling and lowly lot, there is no gold for thee in this cold world of dwarfish charities and saddening inequalities, but the Brother of Nazareth hath gifts for thee better than gold. Go thy ways to Him; there is no barrier at His gate, no guard at His door. Ask Him for wisdom, and He shall fill thy bosom with content,

thy heart with comfort, and thy soul with peace ; and when, as Elder Brother and Joint Heir, with thee He divides His Father's substance, the portion of goods which falleth to thee shall be even as Benjamin's, and will take thee a glad eternity to spend !

HOW MUCH BETTER IS IT TO GET WISDOM THAN GOLD !



## III.

*"THROUGH THE FIRE."*

"When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned."—  
 ISAIAH xliii. 1, 3.

THOMAS BILNEY, one of the earlier reformers, friend and companion of Master Bradford and Hugh Latimer, was condemned to be burnt for heresy. In the streets of the city of Norwich, and surrounded by a weeping crowd, the good man met his death. For some time the flame that rose from furze and faggot blew aside from his scorched limbs. Being an old man and a feeble, his body fell double over the chain that held him by the middle. A bystander drove out the staple, and then Master Bilney, grey-haired, old, and saintly, fell into the centre of the burning pile, and found a chariot of fire in it that took him home to God. When the prison-cell in which he was confined came to be examined, they found the good man's Bible laid open on his bed, just at the page where he had been reading when the time

came for him to get up and die. Moreover, there was a mark made with his own hand in the margin, just by the verses that had been God's own message to his soul that day. They say that Bilney's Bible, that self-same book, he read before he felt the fire, is still to be seen in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and that the grand old martyr's mark is still visible by the verses that blessed his soul amid the faggots and the furze. This was it: "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame enkindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." On the strength of that text, marked with his own hand, lodged in his memory, graven on his heart, Thomas Bilney went to the fire with a smile on his lips; he went through the fire with a song in his heart; he went from the fire with an angel for his comrade, and with a crown upon his brow! By what authority did he put his finger on this grand word, and say, "That is sent to me"? The letter seems to have somebody else's address on it, and yet he applies it to himself without a

question or a doubt, and with such effect, too, that it turned the mortal agony of martyrdom into the glory of a coronation day !

He knew that "Jacob" meant, not the patriarch, nor yet, in its richest meaning, the posterity of Jacob according to the flesh. He knew that "Jacob" meant "heir of the promise ;" "child of faith ;" "sharer of the covenant ;" "relationship to the Messiah—Christ ;" a "lot and portion with God's chosen people ;" adoption into the family in which God is Father, in which Jesus Christ is High Priest for ever, and for which heaven is a Canaan of inheritance, and the New Jerusalem a capital and a home !

But if that is what "Jacob" means, and what "Israel" intends, then every soul who believes the covenant of grace and mercy, who trusts in Jesus, loves God, and seeks to dwell in the light and life of the Holy Ghost, has an equal heritage in this delightful word. "I have called thee by thy name," says your God and Lord. Why ? "Thou art Mine !" You have given your soul to Him, yourself, your service. Then He will call you by your name, your new name ! That was ever the old time custom. Now that Joseph is lifted to Pharaoh's palace and chariot, he is Zaphnath-Paaneah. Now that Daniel is made prime minister to Darius, he shall be called Belteshazzar. Now that Simon Barjonas be-

comes an apostle, he shall be Peter. Now that you are adopted into God's family through faith in Jesus, and by the life-giving Spirit, you shall be called "Jacob," heir of the promises; and if you will wrestle into higher honours, you shall be called Israel, having power to prevail as a prince of God!

Now, Jacob, though you may have sinned as greatly, wandered as far, and blundered as much as your namesake, you are in the covenant, and this grand text is one of the promises which that covenant contains. If you examine it closely, you will notice the frank and matter-of-course way in which your afflictions and trials are mentioned. "The waters," "the rivers," "the fire," "the flame;" it takes it for granted that you will meet with some or all of them before you have finished your course, and they are mentioned in a way, too, that will not suffer you to think lightly of them. "Waters," many of them, and may be deep; "rivers," rushing calamities that threaten to carry you away; "fire and flame!" hard words these, and on the whole I gather from the whole passage that your tribulations, Jacob, are great, various, and sure. But you must not, therefore, come to the conclusion that you have a monopoly of them. Be quite sure that if Bilney burn, Latimer, or Ridley, or somebody else has also to feel the fire. "Never

was sorrow like unto my sorrow" is a complaint that often starts to our lips. I pray you, stifle it when it gets there. Be quite sure that others have been and will be in a far more evil case than you. The limping cripple fretted fearfully until he saw a poor fellow without any feet at all. "Never sorrow was like unto my sorrow." There is only One who ever could say that, and the thought of His afflictions, and for whom they were freely borne, should silence your repinings, though you struggle in the roaring river or feel the devouring fire! Neither do you fall into the common mistake, O Jacob, of thinking the Jacobs and Israels have all the waters and rivers to breast, and all the flames to fight! If Moses has a hard time of it, I think Pharaoh's rivers and fires are quite as fierce as his. I don't see on the whole that Ahab had a much smoother experience than Elijah; and thou, O Jacob, even with all thy cares, may assure thyself that Judas carries his troubles as well as the bag, and perhaps the first are as heavy and the last are as light as thine!

But a careful study of this text suggests another important point. The words, "When thou passest,"—"And when thou walkest," clearly intimate that "Jacob" is travelling, moving from one point to another. He "passes" and he "walks." We may be quite sure that

the "waters," "rivers," "fire," "flame" we read of here, have reference only to such of them as are met with on Jacob's proper track. If these perilous possibilities do not confront him on the way of duty; and if he makes a voluntary circumbendibus, to serve only his own pleasure, so that he confronts them; then, such waters and such fires are very likely to destroy him. My text is the immutable word of truth; and it cannot be twisted about; it won't take a curve for the sake of covering the folly, and saving the life of one who deliberately woos the peril that he ought to shun. Lot goes and settles down in Sodom; he had no more business there than has flour in a soot-bag; and the fire burnt him and the flame scorched him, and when he escaped, he had been burnt out of house and home and gear, and very little left besides the skin of his teeth. You know what became of Pharaoh and his host when they presumed to go on the path opened not for them, but other folks. The waters overflowed Jonah to some purpose; but that was because he went where he liked, and not where he ought. Now, my friend Jacob, and Israel my brother, where are you? Off the line? Diverging from the path? Beware! If the waters rise, you are lost! If the fire breaks out, what will you do? There's no help in the jungle! No safety beyond the fence! Don't leave the

track ! Follow thy Leader ! Follow Him fully ! Then the waters may rise ; the rivers may roll ; the fire may kindle, and the flame may spread. Fear not ! Thou art safe ! Thy moral safety, thy best interests, all that is worth saving are secure. Thy God is pledged to deliver thee from all evil. I do not say that the rising flood may not carry away thy friend, thy fortune, and break down all that thy hands have built ; I do not say that the fire shall not scorch thy plans, wither up thy prospects, melt thy gold, or in some other way assail thee sharply—nay, it may be that thy life may be destroyed either by flood or flame. But this I do say, this I dare say, this I am here told to say, that thou shalt not be drowned. Thy new nature, O Jacob, is unsinkable ! Thou shalt not be burned ; thy character, thy soul, thy heritage is like asbestos and defies the fire.

Fire cannot burn, floods cannot drown ;  
Jacob's immortal ! God calls him—"My own !"

But not only shall Jacob be safe in the flood, and brought through the fire ; not only shall both flood and fire become vanquished perils living only in the victor's memory, but the passing through them shall do good to Jacob ! He shall be a nobler soul for being tossed by waves ; he shall be a purer being for being tried

by fire, and, like the finely-tempered steel which was first in the red-hot furnace, and was then plunged into the ice-cold cistern, and so became the keen, invincible blade: so the trials, afflictions, testings of the Christian do mould and temper and shape and brighten Jacob's character, and ennoble, after the Christly pattern, his moral manhood, which is the glory of his immortal soul!

And now I beg of you to note two things—two things to be remembered in the day of the flood and fire. First, Thy God has promised to be ever at thy side. I will be with thee! With thee, however deep the waters—to bear thee up. With thee, however rough they are—to keep thee calm. With thee, however far they reach—to bring thee through! Not more surely was the Son of God with the Hebrew three within the furnace bars than shall the God of Jacob be with Jacob all the way and all the time; with him nearest, and closest, and most tenderly manifest when the nearer waters roll and the tempest rises high. "I will be with thee." Thy Guide, thy Preserver, Companion and Friend. Within reach of thy whisper, within compass of thy touch, O Jacob, till the gates stand out on Zion like the morning star! And I want you to notice too, that this gracious God, who controls the waters and restrains the fires,



and conducts His people through them both, reveals Himself here as "the Lord that created thee, O Jacob; and He that formed thee, O Israel." He made thee, O Jacob; then He knows thee, knows thy frame; remembereth that thou art dust,—will not put upon thee more than thou canst bear, neither will He forsake the work of His hands. He raised us from the ruins of the Fall, made us temples for Himself to dwell in. Then He will never suffer the structures He has erected at so much care and cost to be thrown down by violence, swept away by turbulent waters, or devoured by the ruthless flame. "Thou art mine!" He says. It is the language of complacency and delight. Thou art *Mine*! My property! My charge! My joy! My jewel! And I will guard My own!

One word in conclusion. Surely with such a text as this to fall back upon, O thou redeemed one, thou wilt not doubt or fear. Cherish thou the full assurance of hope;—that it will be even so as He hath said. The troubled saint is like the wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed, if he has not the assurance that all must be well. If he has, he is like a vessel at anchor, defying every storm. The doubting Christian, when sorrow comes, can scarcely lift his hands in prayer; while he who hopes, confides, relies, wrestles from Jacob into Israel and wins undying

peace. Do you trust Him? Is your trust a repose? Is your rest rounded by a hope? Is your hope an anchor? Is your anchor Christ?

“Then cheerily, brother, hope for the best  
In the day of affliction and sorrow and test.  
Thy God shall be with thee, and never forsake ;  
He knows, and directs too, the way thou shalt take.  
Remember, O Jacob, no waters can drown,  
The simple believer He claims for His own.  
Remember, O Israel, no flame can destroy  
The souls of His people, His glory and joy.”

## IV.

## THE WHITE PLUME.

"A new commandment I give unto you."—JOHN xiii. 34.

"A NEW Commandment." And yet the commandment to "love thy neighbour as thyself" is as old as the Bible, and was enjoined upon the Jewish people almost as soon as they were free from the yoke of the Egyptians. In what sense then is it *new*? Human selfishness and pride—and especially Jewish bigotry and pride—had hidden it and buried it. They had excluded from it all who were not of their race and faith ; they had distorted it, and made it of none effect by their tradition, so that it had come to wear the heathenish form of "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy;" and even *that* crippled form of putting it was the deadest of dead letters by reason of the proud and selfish Pharisaism which left no room for the existence of real disinterested love and charity in social life. Jesus unburies the divine jewel, raises it from the grave which man's de-

pravity had dug for it, purges it from the thick crust of self-worship with which tradition and self-will had wrapped it round. Then lifting it on high to catch the fulness of divine glory reflected from His own noble and matchless life of love, He commands His disciples to wear the bright and beautiful badge as the distinctive token of their love and loyalty to Himself—"By *this* shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

It was *new* as a grand distinctive sign, which hence-on through all the ages was to denote, distinguish, and define the followers of Jesus from all other guilds, schools, creeds, and combinations under heaven. The Pharisee was known by the broad phylactery on his brow, the Sadducee was known by his contempt for ritual, and his ostentatious contrast to the rival sect. The priests and scribes were marked out by their peculiar robes; the Roman, by his toga, or the eagle on his helmet, according as he was citizen or soldier. To-day the Brahmin is known by the mystic character cut upon his breast and brow, and the Mahometan by his head-gear. The soldier's red, the sailor's blue, the cleric's black—by this, that, and the other sign, classes, creeds, professions, preferences, races, are distinguished the wide world over. Some time ago there was quite a warm burst of indignation:

from our Scottish fellow-countrymen because the distinctive plaids and colours of the tartan, which denote the difference between the Campbell, Mackintosh, and Macgregor, were in peril. Well, to those who are Israelites indeed, those who are enlisted under the banner of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, those who are faithful followers of Jesus, and bend a loyal knee to Him of the Crown of Thorns—to these Jesus says, “I institute a new order. In it neither star, ribbon, medal, stripe, nor outward garb, mark, or colour shall find place; but you shall wear a token by which all men shall take knowledge of you that you belong to Me, ‘By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.’”

This was *new*. Further, it was new as a commandment in the *way* in which it was *given*. All previous laws for the control and government of men had been carved on stone—its letter had been embodied in statutes—its terms had been laid down under penalties and pains. But when Jesus says, “A new commandment I *give* unto you,” He means that He puts a new principle into their being, confers a new power on their soul, breathes a new element into their life. It was not an addition to the code of law which they must obey or be punished. It was not so much an edict as an inspiration. You

may put a grain of corn into the earth and bid it grow, but if by some accident or harm there is no life-germ in the husk it cannot shoot; you may place the candle on the stick, and both upon the table, and bid it shine, but unless the light hath been kindled it cannot shine; and so you may be commanded to love humanity with the same love the Master cherished, but unless the spirit of the Lawgiver is breathed into the soul, you can no more fulfil it than you can create a star. It is as if Jesus had said, "A new law I write *in* you—a new rule of life, which shall *inspire* you and *control* you—a new commandment in which all the other commandments shall be wrapped up. It shall lift you out of the region of hard and fast orders, with Sinai fires and judgment penalties attached, and into the region of soul-harmony, holy privilege, practical pleasure, and spiritual delight." This law, this commandment, this sacred Christ-gift, is the LAW OF LOVE!

Under the old law, the soul has to exclaim, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad!" Its demands are strict, its restraints are stern, and at best I crawl painfully, irksomely along at a laggard pace; they are not joyous but grievous. But under the *new* law, given by Jesus, the soul sings with the Psalmist as he presses towards the mark, "I will run in the way of Thy com-

mandments because Thou dost enlarge my heart." And what is the enlarging influence? What is the expanding force? What is the new subtlety that gives life to loyalty, wings to obedience, and lights up dull duty with a dazzle of delight! LOVE? His love, shed abroad in the heart. "A *new* commandment I give unto you. A new spirit I put in you. I *myself* will be your law. I will sit on the throne of your heart. I will wield the sceptre of your will. I will lead you with a silken thread. I will charm you with the music of my voice. I will draw you with the beaming benediction of mine eye. I will endow you with the love which I have of the Father, full, infinite, and free. This love, like the crystal treasures of a fountain, shall overlap the lip of the basin of your own soul-life, shall brim up and overflow, so that the streams from each shall intermix with all; shall roll and flow to all and for all for whom I go to die." "By *this* shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." This is the badge of Christianity. This is the true unfailing test of loyalty to Christ; not creed, not sect, not psalm, not form, not even external deeds of righteousness; do not even the unbelievers the same?—but the gentleness, forbearance, all those tender charities, and all that singular love to humanity which likened

Him to sinful flesh, lowered Him into the darkest abyss of sorrow, the lowest deeps of shame, lifted Him to the cross, laid Him in the grave, the victim and the sport of man and devils—and all that man, the enemy, the criminal, and the rebel, should not perish, but have eternal life! No words can express the vital value of this all-important and potential sign. It is the blush of health upon the cheek that betokens life; it is the golden chain that links us to each other and to the throne of God!

“Lord, who hast taught to us on earth this lesson from above,  
That all our works are nothing worth unless they spring from  
love,

Send down thy Spirit from on high, and pour in all our hearts  
That precious gift of charity which peace and joy imparts.  
The healing balm, the holy oil which calms the waves of strife;  
The drop which sweetens every toil, the breath of our new life.  
Without this precious bond of love God counts the living dead;  
In love we fain would live and move, through Christ our living  
head.

This is the Christian's badge and name, this will our title prove;  
And make our enemies exclaim, See how these Christians love!”

Again, this is a “new” commandment, because the standard and gauge of love is new—the love of Jesus, the Master, the Model, the Perfect Man. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, *as I have loved you*.” Now, ponder a little on *His* love. No love that we can conceive of comes near it. Jesus himself compares the depth and energy of His love, but



the comparison equally outstrips our thought. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." That is the only measure even He can find for the fathomless ocean of His tender charities to men.

We cannot equal it in extent and power, but we can and must in kind and method, in expression and in deed. Note how *freely* His love was given. It was utterly unsought, unbought, undeserved, and undesired. There is a love that springs from gratitude, from the virtues of others, or the relation in which they stand. But a love like Christ's does not stay to ask, "Why *should* I?" "What good is there?" "What has he done?" It does not wait to be bought, or sought, or won. It springs spontaneous in the soul to all and for all the blood-bought sons of men. Note how *costly* was the love of Jesus! Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus. Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor. How poor let His sad life-story tell, His awful pathway wet with tears and blood from the cradle to the grave. Its cost! Is it not written within and without, in mourning, and lamentation, and woe! Our love, like His, must be a love of self-denial, of sacrifice—a giving up, a giving out—a willing spending of strength and substance, a sending forth of costly toils and troubles, a laying out of self and all self has at

the dictates of the new commandment, the constraining impetus of love !

Note how *tender* and *compassionate* was the love of Jesus. No mother for her babe did ever exhibit such a melting tenderness of grace. "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," that was His beautiful character all the way through. Sad hearts, afflicted bodies, distressed fathers, sorrowing mothers, weeping sisters, little children, faulty disciples, malignant men, He loved them all ! Is it not wonderful ? Grace on His lip, kindness in His eye, gentleness in His manner, love in His heart, gifts in His hands for anybody, everybody, all the time. Ill-treatment, hard usage, shameful slander, ungrateful indifference, secret plots, open malice—none of these things moved Him.

His love was royal, rich, gentle, and tender to the end. Note the *bounty* of His love. It owned no limit, felt no weariness, knew no partiality, submitted to no restraint. It was the love of Jesus, fathomless and divine ! This kind of love, a constant increase in the measure of this love, is expected by Him from every man and woman that names His name and professes loyalty to His rule. Out upon all bickerings and whisperings, all cutting words and ungenerous constructions, all coolnesses, all retorts ; they are of the evil one, every one of them an individual spear-

thrust at the great loving heart of Jesus. Power, piety, and all the precious treasures of grace shall dwell in the church where sweet, undimmed, unclouded love is, and over her assemblies shall the wings of the Divine Dove brood in gracious benediction and drop the healing unction upon all.

Let us remember that the church is to have no monopoly of our love. The love of Christ is to be our model, and that took in the whole wide world. The love of Christ proclaimed by us, exhibited and made manifest *in* us, is the one power which shall win the world from the bondage of sin and the power of Satan, and bring in the reign of our glorious Redeemer. "As He hath loved you." Let us keep our eye on *that*, and with His love on our lip and in our life let us go forth and win victories, under the Captain of the Lord's host. In Macaulay's poem on the battle of Ivry, he depicts the great hope of the Huguenots, King Henry of Navarre, marching up at the head of the hosts :—

"The king is come to marshal us, all in his armour drest,  
And he has bound a snow-white plume upon his gallant crest.  
He looked upon his people, and a tear was in his eye,  
He looked upon the foemen, and his glance was bright and high.

Right graciously he smiled on us, as rolled from wing to wing,  
Down all our line the deafening shout, 'God save our lord the king!'

‘ Now if my standard-bearer fall, as fall full well he may,  
For never saw I promise yet of such a heavy fray ;  
Press where ye see my white plume shine, amid the ranks of  
war,  
And be your oriflamme to-day the helmet of Navarre ! ’ ”

We are called to do battle with the hosts of sin—to plunge into the thickest of the fight for the cause of Christ and the salvation of men. We have the badge of war. “ By this shall all men know that we love one another,” and as we war against sin, and do battle with the foe, let us keep our eye on the matchless white plume of our Leader, the pure wings of a dove which crest His brow. “ Follow me ! ” he cries, “ and love EVEN AS I HAVE LOVED YOU ! ”

## V.

## ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."—LUKE xviii. 1.

"*Men ought always to pray.*" Why? Because the King wills it. Your Maker, your Monarch, your Master hath commanded it. Here is His code of laws; here are His supreme directions for your life and conduct. Every one of them known and felt to be righteous and good. Amongst these royal rules for life, the command to pray is clear, direct, and often repeated. The duty of man to "come before the Lord, his Maker," to "call upon his God," is either plainly stated, or clearly implied, on almost every sacred page. We begin, then, at this point—the Divine command. Because it is an edict of eternal wisdom and truth, the command of absolute righteousness and justice, the direction of Infinite Goodness and Love, brought to us by the revelation of God, the voice of His Son, the suggestions of His Spirit, and shines out on every

page of His Book—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

"*Men ought always to pray.*" Why? Because it is an instinct and faculty of our nature, part and parcel of our mental manhood; and as the All-wise Creator has endowed us with the power, and not only the power, but the tendency to pray, we cannot and do not fulfil His will, or rightly use our capabilities, unless we pray. Right down all the ages, from the rude stone altars of Noah and Abraham, through the days of Grecian and Roman shrines, down to the mud-built altar of the Ashanti negro; and right round the world on every line of longitude, and in every land and clime, humanity everywhere possesses the power, cherishes the sentiment, and in some way or other engages in the work of prayer. Even our modern sceptics of the scholastic and scientific class acknowledge and declare that it may be worth while to pray; not because the Deity answers, but because the exercise of prayer has a reflex influence for good upon the petitioners by stimulating and elevating their own souls. That is to say, if an earnest soul shouts into the infinite, and hears nothing but the dull and distant echoes of his own sad, tearful voice, it will cheer his spirit, dry his tears, and anoint him with the oil of gladness. Oh, vain babble! Oh, silly sages! Professing

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yourselves wise, ye are become fools ! Because, then, man has a faculty for prayer, strong, ready, dominant ; because he has an instinct for prayer, which at certain times, and under constraining circumstances, will leap into activity in spite of himself ; and because this power is the gift of the Creator's wisdom and bounty for human good—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

*"Men ought always to pray."* Why ? Because it is not only a duty demanded, and an instinct implanted,—it is also a privilege, a precious privilege conferred. The maker of the machine can mend and manage it ; and He who created us—body, mind, and spirit—invites us to bring our bodily needs, hunger, thirst, aches, pains, and infirmities ; our mental cares, griefs, doubts, perplexities, and depressions ; our spiritual wants, fears, forebodings, sins, and weakness—to Him in prayer. "Bring them to me," saith He, "and according to your faith it shall be done." And sure I am that miracles of healing of body, of mind, of soul, might be far more numerous, far more evident, and far more astonishing than our limping prayers and flaccid faith will now permit. But He is not only the Maker, He is the Monarch of men ; and as our King—the King of kings—He hath pardons to dispense, acquittances to give, honours to confer, treasure to bestow, privileges to grant, favours

to distribute, largess to scatter and gifts to impart. In a royal large-heartedness He makes His throne accessible, flings wide the doors of His treasury, and announces that all comers are welcome to His princely bounty, without partiality, limit, or delay! Again, He is not only your Master, but He calls Himself expressly "Our Father!" and in that aspect He has not only power as your Maker and bounty as your King, but He has pity as your Parent, compassion as your Father, an infinite outgoing towards you of lovingkindness, tenderness, affection and love! Hence He desires, not only to admit you to His presence, introduce you to His treasure-house, but to embrace you in his arms and fold you to His heart! Oh, if we were but wise to understand this, strong to reach after this, how many of our sorrows would vanish, how our peace might flow as a river, and our righteousness and gladness as the waves of the sea! Because prayer is our precious privilege, because our Maker can mend us and manage us; because our King would pardon, honour, and enrich us; because our Master is our Father, and would pity, compassionate, comfort, delight in us, love us; because He invites us, beseeches us, welcomes us—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

"*Men ought always to pray.*" Why? Because our state and condition is one of perpetual



peril, and weakness, and need. The sin on our conscience condemns us, and we cannot undo it. The sin in our nature robs us and ruins us, and we cannot get rid of it. The law has dread claims on us, and we cannot get release from it. Temptation assails us, and we cannot resist it. Danger always surrounds us, and we cannot avoid it. Trouble distresses us, and we cannot contend with it. Sickness seizes us, and we cannot overcome it. Death threatens us, and we cannot evade it. Judgment approaches us, and we cannot meet it. We all get the heartache, and we cannot cure it. We can neither condone our offences, nor lighten our conscience, nor carry our sorrows, nor hush our complainings, nor dry our tears! In our peril, our weakness, our misery, and our need, one cry wells up from the universal human heart—it is a terribly painful and exceeding bitter cry, “Who will show us any good?” The yearning call arises everywhere—from humid cellar, stifling garret, lowly home, stately mansion, prison cell; from kraal and bungalow, hut and hovel, tent and cabin, comes the cry! And all round the world, and through all the realms of mind, there is no voice, nor any that answers. The depth saith, “It is not in me;” and the sea saith, “It is not with me.” Philosophy and science cry with bated breath, “It is high, we cannot attain to it.” Morality, education, com-

merce, and a thousand quackeries of worldly wisdom, sink into humiliating silence. Reason says, "We have heard the fame thereof with our ears, but we know not the place thereof." And infidelity shouts in hard and reckless tones—"There is no good!" But behold the messenger of the Lord! Lift up your eyes and see! "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings; that bringeth good tidings of *good*! That saith unto Zion, *Thy God reigneth*." "Thy" God! "The Lord is good"—good—"and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy"—to whom?—"unto all them that call upon Thee." That is the answer to the cry of the heart. Therefore, because of man's perpetual peril, weakness, and need, and because of God's perpetual power and pitiful grace—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

"*Men ought always to pray*." Why? Because in the infinite love and mercy of God to poor sinners a new and living way hath been opened for us into the presence of God, so that not only doth the sinner gain a hearing, but he has an infinite guarantee that his prayers shall prosper, and his petitions shall be fulfilled. The "good" which the human heart so desperately yearns for is committed into the hands of Jesus Christ. By His perfect atonement for our sin,

He hath made a plain path; hath set before us an open door; and having ascended on high, leading captive all that captured us and held us back from God, He received gifts!—gifts for men! Gifts even for you rebellious ones! and, with all-prevailing merit, gains for you every good and perfect gift. Notice the names that are given Him. He is the Way, He is the Door, He is the Daysman, He is the Advocate, He is the Mediator, He is the Intercessor, He is the Counsellor, He is the High Priest, He is the Surety! All these glorious titles bear directly on the fact that by Him we have access to the Father,—access and success, constant and complete. “For Christ’s sake!” Oh, wondrous plea! Word of power, alike on the lips of a little child, or of wrinkled and infirm old age. Mighty words on the tongue-tip of the sorrowing saint,—ay, and in the mouth of a poor sinner wanting mercy, however great his crimes. “For Christ’s sake.” All round the world humanity may say it; every needy soul under heaven may plead it, and know its all-victorious power. “For Christ’s sake.” Therefore and because our Saviour is our Friend and Brother, our glorious Advocate with God, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

“*Men ought always to pray.*” Why? Because Almighty God, who hears and answers

prayer, hath revealed to us His will that we should pray for others as well as for ourselves; and hath promised that the intercessions of the prayerful shall avail much for the temporal, moral, and spiritual benefit of those for whom they plead. The father shall be heard for his son, as Abraham was for Ishmael. The mother shall be heard for her child, as the Syro-phenician woman for her daughter. The friend shall prevail for his friend, as Jonathan for David. The voyager shall ask for his fellow-passengers, as Paul in the storm of the Adriatic; and a man shall be heard for his very enemies, as Jesus on the cross, or Stephen beneath the stones of martyrdom. Fervent and effectual prayer has a wide domain of power; precious is the patriot's prayer for his country; potent is the philanthropist's prayer for the down-trodden and the needy; Christly is the true Christian's prayer for the world. All men are brothers. We are our brother's keeper; and while a sinner remains unsaved, or a soul unenlightened by the gospel truth; while a curse remains unlifted, a wrong unrighted, or an evil undestroyed; while a mortal man suffers, or a child of man repines; while a heart remains unhappy, or a tear remains undried,—there is righteous cause for prayer and intercession. Because humanity is a brotherhood, and humanity can be blessed through

prayer, therefore,—“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

“*Men ought always to pray.*” Why? Because our needs, our perils, our personal insufficiency, are “always” with us; because the throne of prayer is always accessible, and the Hearer of prayer is always willing; and because the power and privilege of prayer has a direct connection with the whole sphere of our daily life, and the whole circle of our daily needs. The aches and sicknesses of our feeble frame, the perplexities of our business, the trials in our family, the slights and irritations of our social life, the supplies for our table, the comfort of our hearths, the unity of our household, the replenishment of our basket, the sleep for our pillow, the strength for our duty, the enjoyment of our pleasures, as well as the preservation of our lives, the sustentation and salvation of our souls,—all are to be prayed for, all are to be blessed and benefited by constant communion with God in prayer. I beseech you, men and brethren, do not rob yourselves of this precious possession, do not defraud your friends and family, your country and your kind, by restraining your earnest prayers for them before God. Hark to the words of the Master: “Ye shall ask what ye will in my name, and the Father will give it you.” If that wondrous word is true in

anywise,—and it was the Truth who said it,—then “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

“*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*” Why not? Because no really earnest and reliant prayers can possibly be in vain. We are apt to faint in our petitionings, if the gift we seek is long delayed. But then we forget that the times and the seasons are in His own power; and that, though our Lord delayeth His coming, He never comes *too late*. The feet of Israel were washed by the mocking waves of the Red Sea before the waters were rent in twain; the arm of Abraham was uplifted and the knife gleamed in Isaac’s upturned face, before the angel said, “Stay thine hand;” the fourth watch of the night came, and the storm had reached its height, and hope was dying in the disciples’ hearts, when Christ walked across the sea to succour them; and the Apostle Peter lay bound in chains in Herod’s prison, and under the very shadow of the scaffold until the dawning of the morn on which he was to die;—but Israel walked safely through, Isaac’s life was spared, the fishing-boat reached the shore, and Peter was set free—for all that. There is an end, and the hope of the righteous shall not be cut off. Besides, God’s refusals are often gracious answers,—merciful interventions of a wiser and

better will than ours. Because God is true and faithful, and because His promises are abiding and His covenant is sure, there should be no faltering in our prayers, no drooping in our hopes, no lowering of our uplifted hands, no dimming of the eyes with doubtful tears,—because He is faithful that promised, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

Oh, how easy God hath made it to pray ! Every time, place, posture is fitting. Talent is not needed, eloquence is out of place, and dignity is no recommendation. Our want is our eloquence ; our misery is our recommendation ; our needs the only letters and certificates we have to bring. Thought is quick as lightning, and quick as lightning it can multiply effectual prayer. Actions can pray, sufferings can pray. There need be no ceremonies ; there are no rubrics to keep. The whole operation is this—a child at a father’s knee, his words stumbling out in very earnestness, and his wistful face pleading better than his stammering tongue. I beseech you come to Christ as the disciples did, and say, “Lord, teach us how to pray.” Be resolved on having possession of this mighty power, of wielding this invincible blade, of working this almighty engine ! This is the secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear Him—the grip that holds the angel and will not let him go. Pray,

I beseech you; however you halt, and fail, and stammer—begin. Talk with God! *He* will show you how. The publican's prayer in the Temple will do well for a beginning; keep at it,—“God be merciful to me a sinner.” Or the prayer of Peter, when he began to sink, “Lord, save, or I perish!” The Spirit of our blessed Lord will lead you on by degrees until you shall be “mighty in prayer,” and, next to God's almightiness, that's the mightiest force there is!—and, remember, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

Prayer brings the power to pray. It makes Jacob into an Israel, and stripling David into a slayer of giants. Prayer divides seas, routs armies, expels devils, shuts the mouths of lions, opens the gates of brass; prayer expands loaves, perpetuates meal and oil, and makes the sun stand still. It rolls the stone from the very grave, snaps the chains of the prisoner, and either extracts the grievous thorn or sends the balsam of compensating grace. Prayer turns a Bochim into Bethel, makes the valley of Baca into a bright Bethesda, turns a fire-crowned Sinai into a Hermon diademed with dew. Prayer oils the wheels of business, flings a glow about the fire-side, throws a light upon the perplexing pages of the ledger in hard times, softens family troubles, soothes social irritations, invests the Church with



power, from on high, and hastens the millennial year of Christ ! All this *has* been done, *is* being done, and *can* be done to a more glorious degree than ever. Nothing is impossible with God, and God is pledged to the length of His eternity, and the depth of his infinity, and the breadth and height of His omnipotence to answer prayer. Surely, then, surely, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Remember, you can pray for *any need*,—for lengthened life, as Hezekiah did ; for help, as Daniel did ; for light, as Bartimeus did ; for mercy, as David did ; for rain, as Elijah did ; for a son, as Hannah did ; for grace, as Paul did. You can pray, too, *anywhere* ; in the deep, like Jonah ; on the sea or the house-top, like Peter ; on your bed, like Hezekiah ; in the mountain, like Jesus ; in the wilderness, like Hagar ; in the street, like Jairus ; in a cave, like David ; on the cross, like the dying thief. You can pray, too, *anyhow* ; short, like Peter and the publican ; long, like Moses at the consecration of the Tabernacle, or Solomon at the dedication of the Temple. You can pray in silence, as Hannah did in the Temple ; in your secret thoughts, as Nehemiah did before Darius ; or aloud, like the Syro-phenician woman ; in tears, like Magdalen ; in groans, or songs, as David did. You can pray *any time*. In the morning, like David ; at noon, like Daniel ; at

midnight, like Silas ; in childhood, like Samuel ; in youth, like Timothy ; in manhood, like the centurion ; in age, like Simeon ; in sickness, like Job ; or in death, like Jacob and the dying Christ. And all of them were heard by the Hearer of prayer. I pray you, learn to pray ! Link yourselves to the throne of God. Prayer will stand you in good stead every day of your mortal life ! will make you joyful in the hour of death ; and by the power of prayer you shall scale the mount of God ! Pray !

**“MEN OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY, AND NOT TO FAINT.”**

## VI.

*OUR DAILY BREAD.*

"Give us this day our daily bread."—MATT. vi. 11.

"GIVE us this day our daily bread." From the day you and I first learned to lisp it by a mother's knee, we have offered it, either in form or fact as a prayer to Heaven, many and many a time. What does it mean? What does it include? What lessons does it teach? What kind of spirit does common honesty demand that it should be offered in? What kind of life does it imply on the part of those who offer it; remembering always that God is a Spirit—the All-seeing Spirit, and that they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth?

Did you ever notice how this prayer is placed? "Thy will be done." That takes the soul right away up into the very highest glory and perfection of heaven! Forgive us our sins? That reaches right down into the dark deeps into which our trespasses have plunged us.

From those great deeps—"our debts;" to those heights—"as it is in heaven," we are to rise! Yet between these two comes my text, "Give us this day our daily bread," a prayer for our business and our basket; a petition for the cupboard and the cruse, for the table and the hearthstone; lying kindly, tenderly, between the depth of our fall and the height of our call! Verily, "He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust." It is as much as to say, that our God can make our bread-winning to help our heaven-winning; and that our daily labour for the loaves for the need of to-day shall not hinder but further Christ's labour of love for the glory of our final to-morrow. Listen! Our debts—our bread—our heaven. The first, forgiven; the second, given;—the third, gained;—our Father's mercy, and bounty, and blessing for body and soul!

There are in the Lord's Prayer seven petitions. The first three have to do with our duty to God. Hallowed be Thy name! Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done! Thy name, Thy kingdom, Thy will. Then it becomes—"Give us," "Forgive us," "Lead us," "Deliver us." The Lord's Prayer has two tables, you see, like the tables of the law, and here, as in the commandments, our duty to our God stands first. First comes reverence, then comes loyalty, then

comes submission—then comes bread! That's God's order. Our wickedness, our selfishness, our folly, seeks to reverse the order: first, bread, basket, business, barter—then according as we have time and inclination, worship, and submission, and the claims of God. Hence we are baffled and bruised in the battle of life; hence we stumble and struggle, and talk of the hard up-hill toil, that tries and tires. O fools, and slow of heart to believe what the Master hath spoken! Begin at the other end, O tearful moiler! Change thine aim, O weariful drudge, who art all but worsted in the conflict for subsistence! "Seek ye first—*first*, do you hear: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of them; and His faithfulness and love are pledged to the uttermost to meet all your necessities out of the fulness of his power.

Oh, man of many wants, hear thou the word,  
Spoken to thee by thy all-gracious Lord!  
"All things thou needest I will give to thee:  
But first of all—give thou thyself to me!"

"Bread." Life's commonest necessity, our physical care and craving; and this most practical of gifts lies in the very middle of Christ's own model prayer for daily use! And yet there are people who regard the Christian religion as

visionary, contemplative, a matter that lies outside the circle of the actual ; a something above, beyond, and apart from the ordinary acts and experiences of life ! Yet here it is ! a thing of the pantry and the pocket, mingled and wrapped up with pardon and paradise. It is a golden ladder, this religion of Jesus, bright with the vision of angels, and with its top among the stars, and resting hard by the throne of God. And yet it is set up on earth amid tools and toil, business and bread. You are not to understand by this word *bread* only the loaves you need to slice up for yourselves and your household, but provisions in general, and whatever of temporal good is required to supply your daily wants. But you are to understand it as excluding all that does not come within the meaning of "necessities." The word translated "daily" does not refer so much to the idea of time as of sufficiency. You and I may ask for competent supplies. What you need to eat ; what you need to drink ; and, wherewithal, for decency and comeliness, ye require for clothing : these are amongst the guaranteed assurances of our blessed Lord, our Brother, our Benefactor, our faithful, unchangeable Friend ! "Enough to sustain us,—but not enough to pamper us ; enough for comfort, but not enough for display ; enough to free us from needless anxiety,

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but not enough to free us from a healthy dependence on our God. This prayer has nothing to do with superfluity ; it frowns upon excess ; it has no favour for anybody's haste to be rich." "Having food and raiment, let us learn therewith to be content." That is the full measure of meaning which you and I are permitted to attach to the prayer—"Give us this day our daily bread!" As quaint old Philip Quarles puts it :—

"Having enough, what more should I desire ?  
Desire beyond enough brings peace no nigher ;  
Content with little, peace doth with me stay,  
But soon as I cry 'more' it vanisheth away."

I cannot help thinking that there is and was intended to be a definite and wholesome lesson in this word. "Give us this day *our* daily bread." That cannot be the bread of idleness. It cannot properly be applied to the food which is received in charity, when there is no earthly reason why we should not go forth in manly independence, and earn our own loaf. The prayer is not—"Give me this day somebody else's bread—give us this day bread anyhow, and from any quarter ;" but, give us *our* bread : that which has fairly and honestly become *ours*, by the sweat of our own brow, by the honest toil of our own hands. I remember reading the memoir of some good and successful man, who

says, in reference to his first start in the world : "That was a sweet loaf, both crust and crumb, that I bought and paid for out of my first wages." You see, it was *his* daily bread. Now, whatever our station, our lot in life may be, let us seek, in this respect, to exhibit true self-respect and self-reliance ; and while we ask our God to give us daily bread, let us ask and strive, too, that it may be ours, not other people's ; ours, not our creditors' ; ours, not by fraud or wrong, but our own genuine property, which God hath enabled us to win. Remember the broad hint which the Apostle Paul gives to some of the Thessalonians, to whom he writes : " We commanded you that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and *eat their own bread.*" That's it—give us this day our daily bread.

Give us this day our daily bread. The prayer, you see, takes it for granted that we are always under the watchful care of our Heavenly Father ; and yet how much we give way to fretful doubt and anxious care ! Care for to-day kills units—care for to-morrow kills thousands. How anxious some of us are to get, and to keep, and to get



more ; and all this under the notion of being "independent." The man who takes on himself the entire burden of all these things finds that they cost him a high price for all the satisfaction he gets ; and those who have got to be "independent," and have totally loosened themselves from all employment, are largely a discomfort both to themselves and other people. A moderate amount of laying up for a rainy day, or against the possible needs of age, is quite compatible with this prayer ; but it points steadily and surely to the wisdom of being contented with little, and of avoiding all anxious concern about to-morrow. "Take no thought," says the Saviour, that is, make no trouble, of to-morrow ; even the flowers of the field, without the labourer's toil, or the weaver's skill, are clad by the fingers of God more gaily than Solomon in his garments of purple and gold ; and the birds of the air that plough no furrow, and have no harvest troubles, are all fed by the Unseen Hand, their one sufficient barn being the goodness of their Maker ; surely the children of the Father need not fear ! I wonder, now, if all our cares and fears were analysed, how many of them have their origin in something that may possibly come to us to-morrow ; and that not an immediate to-morrow, but some far-distant one that is to come flapping a heavy

wing this way, and of which our fears and apprehensions give us already many a grim and ghostly look. Away with such folly and such sin! Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. As thy day is, thy strength shall be. Let our prayer be, Lord, mete for me the need of the hour—or in these peerless words: Give us *this* day our daily bread.

God's help is pledged to me, to-day;  
Why should I sadly borrow,  
To make more rough my present way,  
Thorns that may grow to-morrow?

For if my path to-morrow strews  
With briers rough and thorny,  
My God will give me brazen shoes,  
Unharm'd to go my journey.

My God is always near to-day;  
And, gladdest of surprises,  
I find to-morrow *is* to-day,  
When next the sun arises.

My daily prayer is daily said,  
My trust is true and thorough;  
"Give me this day my daily bread:"  
I leave with God the morrow.

But I must point your attention to one word more in this petition. Give us *our* daily bread. The model prayer has no exclusiveness. It is a stranger to selfishness. It is not give me *my* daily bread. "Our Father" owns our brotherhood, and our brotherhood cares for the wants of others as well as our own; and we cannot

use this prayer aright, cannot hope to win the Father's gracious answer to it, unless we are open-hearted and open-handed to our brother's honest need. Jesus would that we remember the poor. The Jews have a capital proverb, "He that prays for another is heard for himself." Let us break our bread to the hungry, so shall our daily bread be sweeter to the palate and come more surely to the hand.

It is said of a certain lad who had listened long to his well-to-do father's prayers for the poor and needy, that after they rose from their knees, the boy appeared moody and silent. "What are you thinking about, my son?" said the father, who probably thought his prayers were bearing fruit in the boy. "I was thinking, father, that if I had your corn-bags, I would soon answer your prayers." I am afraid there is a good deal of similar devotion. Brothers! when ye pray, say, Give us this day our daily bread! And do your best among God's poor ones to help to answer your own petitions. "The bag is full," said a kindly farmer, "though enough has missed the mouth to give the birds a dinner."

"*Give* us this day our daily bread!" It breathes absolute dependence. You can't buy it, you can't borrow it, you can't make it—this daily bread. You and I are pensioners, and

God must give. Strength to gain it, skill to earn it, power to eat it—all are from Him. From Him the soil, the seed, the sun, the harvest. What hast thou that thou hast not received? How long the gifts have come to you! How bountiful they have been and still are! And, once again, before stern winter comes with shivering blast across the bare and empty fields—He hath sent bread enough and to spare. Our Father! May our hearts be filled with gratitude and our lives with praise. “Give us this day our daily bread.” With what kind of hands will you receive it? Are they soiled with crime, stained with selfishness and sin? And when the bread comes to you, how will you use it? To grieve Him! To forget Him! To serve His enemies! To dishonour His name! Oh, I charge you, by the mercies of God, the mercies of the harvest, of all the harvests by which you have been fed, by the mercies of your life, your table, your home, your health, your family, your friends—all mercies of God; I beseech you by the mercies of the Cross, the loving, dying Jesus crucified for you; by the mercies of long-suffering and forbearance, by which He hath borne long with you—give your hearts to Him, give your lives to Him, give the thanks of your soul to Him: and, in conclusion, remember that “Our Father” gave His Son to be the life of

the world. He said, I am the Bread of Life. For the bread that perisheth, and for the Bread of God, the life of Christ, let us return thanks to-day.

“ We thank thee, Lord for this our food,  
But more because of Jesu's blood ;  
Let manna to our souls be given,  
The Bread of Life sent down from heaven.”

## VII.

## AT SEA IN A STORM.

“Be of good cheer ; for I believe God.”—Acts xxvii. 25.

IN one brief line Paul sketches for us his creed, his character, and his conduct. Almost as quickly as the sun can make a photograph the Apostle draws a living portrait of himself. “Whose I am, and whom I serve.” *Multum in parvo*—a volume in a sentence. If you will study it closely, you will see that that brief motto has got in it all the essentials of Christian faith and practice. “Whose I am !” He used to consider himself his own. And of all the gods that Paul worshipped, and of all the masters that Paul owned, there is no doubt that his own proud, pharisaic self was head and chief. Now, self is uncrowned, every other rule is broken, and Paul takes God for his Owner, his Master, his King. He willingly gives himself to Christ. “Whose I am, and whom I serve !” Here is loyal, diligent service. He puts himself thoroughly at His Master’s disposal.

The Word of God is the rule of his life; the will of God is the law of His whole heart. "I serve!" Hand to do—foot to go—tongue to speak—heart to beat—brain to think—all His; for him to live was Christ. Whether he ate or drank, woke or slept, rejoiced or suffered, lived or died, that was his all-impelling and imperial motto—"Whose I am, and whom I serve!" His was a consecrated heart and life. Bear this in mind! I am about to show you wonders, marvels, miracles, if you choose; but these words are the key to it all. When I look at a tree full of sap and beauty, I say the life is in the root. When I see youth, hale, strong, elastic, I say the life is at the heart. When I see the wondrous telegraph or telephone perform their novel wonders, I say the secret is in the battery or jar. When I see the mighty engine driving ponderous wheels, drawing tremendous loads, or ploughing the waves at speed, I say the secret's in the piston-chamber. And when I see Paul, grey-haired Paul, stand on the reeling deck amid the storm—grand, noble, majestic, strong—I say the secret's here—"Whose I am, and whom I serve."

Having got a clear view of Paul's principle, which lies at the base of all, let us look at Paul's peril in this storm. It is a painful picture, and no words of mine can make more forcible the

vivid colours of the story as written by St. Luke. The winds set in strong, boisterous, and contrary; sailing becomes dangerous; then the tempestuous Euroclydon blew a hurricane aloof, and they are exceedingly tossed with a tempest. The storm grows fiercer; the waves rage and roll around the doomed vessel; planks are started, leaks are sprung, masts go by the board, savage seas sweep across the deck, and all the while no sun-gleam chances through the murky sky by day, no star peeps through pall-black lift at night. The frantic crew struggle vainly in the awful clash of elements; wrapped alike in gloom and storm, and with the awful roar of breakers in their ear, they lose all heart at last, and all hope that they would be saved was taken away. They did their best for dear life's sake, but they were no match for the raging monster that assailed them. They sailed under the lee as long as they durst, then they anchored a while in hope the storm would pass. They tried to find a sheltered roadway off the Cretan harbour. They let the vessel drive before the wind; by rope and chain they undergirded the shaken keel, they lightened the cargo, overthrew the tackling—did all they could, and all in vain. The billows broke more fiercely, more wild the tempest blew; and all the helpless crew could do was to peer through the desperate darkness, listen



with throbbing heart to the roar of the tempest, and "wish for the day."

Well, storms and tempests have blown both before and since, both on sea and land ; storms of many kinds, tempests of many forms ; and many have yet to blow. Winds, waves, and darkness, that trinity of troubles, are familiar to all men more or less. Bodily pains, social sorrows, temporal anxieties, household troubles, family bereavements, as well as what is stormy in the general, often surge and foam around our life-bark, and threaten to engulf us. "It is heavier than I can bear !" says Job. "All things are against me !" says Jacob. "I shall perish by the hands of Saul," says David. "Let me die under this juniper !" says Elijah. "Let this cup pass from me !" says Jesus Himself. Courage ! Ye who battle with storms, you are in brave company, you see ; and these all lived to sing of victory and grace.

Now let us look a little on board the ship which is in such grievous straits. That poor battered hull carries nearly three hundred souls. There are rough, rude sailors there, who have weathered many a storm ; there are brawny soldiers who have borne the brunt of many a battle ; there are traders there of many tribes who have dared much for greed and gain ; there are vagrant wanderers there of no fixed habita-

tion; there are criminals there on the way to Nero's bar. It is a motley crew. Amid the fierce terror of those dreadful days there are opposing counsels, passions are aroused, oaths and blasphemies are heard, prayers are offered to vain idols, and cries of fear and despair rise from many a lip. In and round and over all is heard the wild howling of the tempest; deep calleth unto deep as death flaps his dark wings upon the hurricane and swoops to seize his prey. I see Paul the aged, wayworn prisoner of Christ, standing amid the excited crowd—standing erect and calm; within him is a peace no wrathful winds can ruffle, a sense of security that no wild waves can destroy. Hark! how he counsels and encourages the drooping crew! "Be of good cheer!" His voice rings out the hearty call, and thus he forces his strong self-confident spirit into those from whom all hope had fled. The storm beats hard on his grey head, the deck reels beneath him, the skies show no beam of hope, and the flood yawns like an open grave. Yet his soul is strong, his nerve unstrained. God was his strength. He felt himself the ward of Omnipotence and felt no fear! You and I may join company with him in this. We may cling to the Eternal in every storm of life and find him still a refuge and a very present help. Whatever euroclydons of

trial, suffering, or temptation may assail us, we may cry in triumph, "Because the Lord is at my right hand I shall never be moved!"

But while this commotion wakes the awful night on board that ship, what is Paul doing? He is holding communication with heaven. "This night," says Paul, "there stood by me an angel of God!" You know what that means. "Night is the time to pray!" sings Montgomery, and especially is this true of the night of peril. While the sailors on board the stricken ship vainly toil to keep the ship afloat, while some pass the sleepless night in dumb scared wonder, while others snatch a brief oblivion in sleep, Paul, in his berth or private corner, is calling upon God. The winds may howl a dirge, the waves may chant a threnody, the crew may utter angry shouts and curses, the frightened passengers may cry out for fear—Paul cries to his God, and wields a power more potent than the elements at war! I have heard of storms that break the telegraphic wires and stop communication between distant parts; I have heard of captains shouting vainly through their speaking-trumpets, the winds carrying the sound mockingly away; I have heard of the throb of the minute-guns, the hoarse signal of distress failing to reach the distant shore of help by reason of the tempest's roar. But never yet was wind let loose or tempest brewed that

could arrest a heartfelt prayer despatched by faith up to the throne of God. Through storm and darkness Paul's petitions cleft their way to Him who on the waterfloods still sitteth King and God. Oh, sirs ! I tell you prayer is still a resistless power ! Amid your stormy strife and toilsome tempest, your strong, " Lord, help me ! " shall pierce the leaden skies, defy the noise of war, and win an audience in heaven ! I have heard it said that, amid the din of a pealing organ, the crash of orchestral brass, and the rolling volume of a thousand lifted voices, one clear note of finest tension can be heard to overtop them all. Such a note shall thy prayer be, my friend and brother, that cometh not out of feigned lips. Above the din and bluster of thy multitude of cares, it shall rise and fall like music on the ear of God.

Then follows in this stirring narrative a strange experience. " An angel stood by me ! " says Paul. Black and frowning are the heavens overhead, dark and raging are the seas below, strong and fierce are the winds around, and yet an angel herald of gleaming wing and stainless robe stands in the quivering cabin redolent with heavenly peace. Little recked the panic-stricken crew of the sacred visitor they bore on board. I have heard of kings' messengers and their despatches thwarted of their mission ; I have read of floods

that have swept the railway track and stopped the iron steed midway upon its journey with the baffled mails behind; I have heard of storms which have sunk and silenced the floating carriers of the sea; I have heard of simoons and tornadoes which have buried toiling caravans in desert sand—but never storm was brewed nor tempest loosed that could check the downward sweep of a celestial ambassador, or retard for one brief moment the flight of an angel's wing! Said the angel, "Thou must be brought before Cæsar!" That is enough. When God says *must*, no power, no combination of powers, can say *may*! Brothers, it is so still. It is true to this day. I will deliver thee. None shall pluck thee out of my hand. I will that thou shouldest be with me where I am. Give yourselves to prayer. This is the talisman that wards from every danger, cries "Hands off!" to every peril, wins every blessing that soul or body righteously requires!

Then comes what is, to my mind, the grandest scene in the whole narrative. The vision is over; the ængelic messenger flies back and upward through the night. But Paul has got the message; it is on his lips and in his heart. He hastens upon deck, the first dull rays of returning twilight greeting him as he goes. He staggers on with difficulty. He holds by rail, or rope, or bulwark; then, flinging his arm around the

broken mast, he shouts, "Be of good cheer! Not a life shall perish! The ship shall sink; the crew shall live!" Did they wonder if the awful strain on mind and body had sent him mad? He tells them of the angel's visit. Did they greet it with a despairing laugh of incredulity? He plants his foot firmly on the reeling deck; he draws his figure to his full height; he fixes his clear eye through the darkness on the Unseen, and, regardless of blackened skies, churning billows, thundering winds, creaking timbers, and the mixed sounds of wrath and fear, he shouts, "I believe God! It shall be even as He hath told me!" The sea mocks him; the winds laugh loudly at him; all the turbulent air seems filled with gibing spirits who scoff at such a forlorn and idle hope. But he holds his ground. "I believe God!" His confidence is contagious; the crew catch something of his spirit. Hope dawns, and they set down amid the hurly-burly to eat bread!

I counsel you to take that as your motto—I believe God! He says of sin, I will pardon; of sorrow, I will comfort; of peril, I will deliver; of weakness, I will support; of storms, I will protect; of thy soul, I will save! Believe God! for it shall be even as He hath told thee! You know the rest. The ship runs aground, becomes a total wreck, but all the crew—all the 276 souls

on board—get safe to land. I believe God! Safe to land! The two sentences go together; they interlock. As I think of Paul's triumphant cry, and then see him stand safe and sound upon the sands of Malta, the words come to me—true, clear, glorious—I believe God!

“The God that rules on high,  
That all the earth surveys,  
Who rides upon the stormy sky,  
And calms the roaring seas—  
This awful God is ours,  
Our Father and our love;  
He will send down His heavenly powers,  
To carry us above.”

## VIII.

*THE NEAREST WAY HOME.*

"But God led the people about."—EXOD. xiii. 17, 18.

"AND it came to pass." How constantly that form of expression is used in this book. It begins with Genesis; it marches right through the Bible, until we come to the Revelation of St. John; and if it is less common there than elsewhere, it is because the events of which it speaks are coming to pass, and the end is not just yet. But of that, too, right up to the final word—"Behold, I come quickly"—it shall be said, "And it came to pass." To the careless and indifferent soul who lives at ease in the quiet hours of to-day, it is a word of solemn warning—it shall pass; the stream of time bears all things on its flood, and by and by it shall bear you yourselves along its silent tide, and of your hours, opportunities, probation, it shall be said, "It came to pass;" to pass—to pass like all the rest of the steadily unrolling, steadily moving, steadily passing panorama of life.



"To-day, I have and I am ; to-morrow, he had and he was.  
So all things are moving, with never a moment of pause.  
How many things come to us, come—come, but, alas !  
Of us and all comings 'twill one day be said, 'It only came—  
to pass.'  
But of all the coming and going, on one we may ever rely :  
The love of our God cometh ! cometh ! but never passeth us  
by !"

"And it came to pass." It is a word of comfort to every faithful believer in Christ. Every temptation, every sorrow, every day of darkness, every hour of pain that comes, comes—to pass. To pass as surely as the sunlight follows rain. Is sickness coming, it comes to pass. Is death coming, it comes to pass. To pass ! The sky is to be swept of every cloud ; it must pass, and then the new heavens and the new earth cometh, and neither these nor their immortal inhabitants can ever pass away.

"When Pharaoh had let the people go." You see he had to let them go. He was a king, and a mighty one too. He had a strong grip ; his muscle was hard as iron, his will was granite, his heart was hard, and he held the grip firm and tight upon the captive Jews. But he had to let them go. To the waiting Jews, I daresay, it seemed a long and weary time ; and many a time they said, as you have said, "It will never come." But never is a long word. When God's time

came, deliverance came. The hand of the big clock crept along, oh, so slowly, and it seemed as though it would never climb to the hour. The people suffered and the people prayed, and the grasp of the Egyptian never relaxed. Tick, tick, in tiresome monotony, went the clock, slowly went the pointer upwards, and—just as they drooped their heads and cried, “Hope is dead!”—the finger touched the hour, the great bell of God’s providence rang out like a thunder boom, and in a moment Pharaoh’s hand is paralysed, the captive’s chains are broken ;

“Jehovah hath triumphed ! His people are free !”

Pharaoh had to let the people go ! Do you hear it, O ye servants of the living God ? Ye who pray and wait for light and help and hope and deliverance ? The great clock of God is going still ! still the finger moves at the same slow fixed pace along the dial plate, and for you the hour of redemption is at hand.

“Hope, brother, hope ! however long the night,  
The morning cometh, and there *shall* be light.  
Strive, brother, strive ! for none shall try in vain ;  
His hour is coming ; God shall break the chain !  
Pray, brother, pray ! call on His mighty name ;  
He comes ! He comes ! as He to Israel came.  
Wait, brother, wait ! this word thy heart shall cheer ;  
E’en while thou waitest, lo ! the Lord is *here*.

Hope, strive, wait, pray ! in faith and trust stand still ;  
God's word can never fail, and He hath said—'I will !'

"God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines." I am surprised at that. He is going to take them to Canaan. It's a straight line from Egypt to Canaan through the land of the Philistines, a bee-line, direct as the crow flies, and will bring them into the Land of Promise far sooner than any other route they can possibly take. That is the way Joseph's brethren took when they went down to Egypt to buy corn, and depend on it, they took the nearest way. The north of Egypt and the south of Canaan were divided by a narrow belt of country that they might have crossed in a few days. Look at the map, and you would say—"Yes, that's the plan, right over there, through the land of the Philistines." But, God led them *not* that way, "not through Philistia, though it was near." Why? Ay, that's the point. There was a reason that they did not know, but He did. You and I often mark a path out for ourselves; and to us it seems so easy, so likely, so promising of success. Then all at once something happens that disappoints us, and directs us another road that we find further round and apparently much harder; and we call it a "mysterious Providence." Of course, all is mysterious that is the result of

wider knowledge than our own. Do you remember old Quarles' lines?—

"I say this way ; God says that.  
His way is best, for He knows what  
Of lions may beset my road.  
I'll follow Thee ! Lead on, my God !"

"Lest the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt." You see the Almighty knew the people, and He knew the Philistines. The Israelites neither knew themselves nor the folks through whose land they wanted to go. He knew them to be a poor, weak, dispirited people, whose heart had been eaten out of them by long-continued slavery. Their spirit was broken by oppression. Timid as hares they were, and accustomed to shrink before a driver's whip. They were only shepherds, brickmakers, and such like. It was not likely that they could fight well, and it was very likely that they would run away. So their gracious God will not let them "see war" just yet, lest they should fail at the first brunt, and grow so disheartened and panic-stricken as to break their lines, fling down their weapons, and run back for dear life ! Then again, He knew the Philistines. They were a strong, numerous, stalwart and warlike people, used to battle, real veterans in the field, who would, as we use to say, have made "mince-meat"

of such raw recruits as these poor, feeble, newly-rescued slaves. It would have been a dire calamity for them to have to stand up and do battle with foes like these. So the Lord will not suffer them to "see war," "nor go through the land of the Philistines, although it was near."

He knew what was best and safest, and, in the long run, surest; and by the good hand of God they were kept out of mischief and away from danger. The old proverb is still very true: "The longest way about is often the nearest way home." "He that goes straight across, may have to carry a cross. He that goes round about, may have the chance to go without." His thoughts are not our thoughts, and it is a grand thing to be under His guidance; for "the way of man," as the good Book says, "is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." We know not what is good for us, and, like children, if we were to run alone, we should soon run into mischief. You and I have often been imposed on, both by what we hope and what we fear. Many a time we have tried to run away from what afterwards turned out to be a blessing, and many a time we have been disappointed to save us from being destroyed. I remember on one occasion, when I was young, I got it into my head that I was able to drive. Having narrowly

escaped an upset, and frightened myself almost out of my wits, I resigned the reins into more skilful hands than mine, and travelled safely. Let us be as wise as the psalmist, and say, "The Lord shall choose mine inheritance for me!" Let us learn a lesson of patience, too. We may be very anxious to pluck the fruit; but we had better wait till it's mellow, for fear the pain kills all the pleasure. God's time is a good time, and God's way is a safe way, both to-day and to-morrow, too!

*"Having, to-day, may bring me sorrow,  
Waiting, may bring me joy to-morrow!"*

"But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea." You see He *did* lead them, though not as they expected. If He had left them to do the best they could, after blocking one road up, they might have become faint-hearted and have come to grief. But *He led them*. That was the main thing. It does not much matter where we are led, if God will only undertake for us. To have a happy consciousness that the Lord *is* our Shepherd may well save us from any anxiety as to whether there are any streams and pastures where we are going. He will see to that; and if they are not there, He will make the grass to grow and the waters flow, so that the grey

desert shall become like Goshen, and a dry wilderness a place of broad rivers and streams.

You notice that He led them "in the way of the wilderness"—no, that isn't it, "*through* the way of the wilderness." Let hopeful Christians learn to speak correctly. We don't say the train ran into a tunnel, but *through* a tunnel; so that, after the noise and the smoke and the dark, there come the gleam of light, the glow of the landscape, and the glory of the day! I want you to notice, too, that it is called "the wilderness of the Red Sea." "Wilderness" is not pleasant travelling, but a wilderness with a sea at the other side is a very unpromising outlook. With no ships, boats or rafts, when we get to it, it looks like an imprisonment, looks like going up a blind alley, with no alternative but to plod back again. You and I, my friends, have many a time been in straits like that, and we have said with a sigh, "What shall we do!" Well, that is what the Israelites said when they got there, and a dreadful fume they were in, as you may remember. But their God knew what to do; and so the sea was torn asunder, a path of firm dry sand was made in the midst of it, and they marched as safely and as comfortably over as if they had been merely promenading a sandy beach in vacation time. Hear it and receive it, O Christian! God's arm is not shortened that

it cannot save. He will not lead you *your* way, lest you come to harm. He will lead you *His* way, for it's the way of safety. If it should be a wilderness way, He will lead you *through* it; and if at the end a deep broad sea or a raging river should bar your path, He'll strike a high-way through the middle of it, and conduct you dryshod to the other side. When Charles Wesley marched safely through a passionate mob of persecutors at Portsmouth, through a flight of sticks and stones, without a bruise, he sang in gratitude this song—

“Worship and thanks and blessing and strength ascribe to  
Jesus !

Jesus alone defends His own, when earth and hell oppress us.

Jesus with joy we witness, almighty to deliver ;

Our seals set to that God is true, and reigns a King for ever !

Omnipotent Redeemer ! our ransomed souls adore Thee !

Our Saviour Thou, we find it now, and give Thee all the  
glory.

We sing Thine arm unshortened, brought through our sore  
temptation ;

With heart and voice in Thee rejoice, the God of our salvation.

Thine arm hath safely brought us a way no more expected

Than when Thy sheep passed through the deep, by crystal  
walls protected.

Thy glory was our rearward, Thy hands our lives did cover,

And we, even we, have passed the sea, and marched triumphant over.”



## IX.

*GOD'S HIDDEN ONES.*

"Thy hidden ones."—PSALM lxxxiii. 3.

I KNOW few studies that may be made more profitable to Christian people than the names and titles which are given to them in the Book of God. They are called the "flock of God," to intimate His care and their sure supplies; they are called "trees of God," to intimate their hidden life, their growth and fruitfulness; they are called His "jewels," to denote their preciousness and rarity; they are called the "family," the "children," the "household" of God, to denote His Fatherhood and their happiness and home; they are called the "priesthood of God," that they may be holy and separate, and present daily sacrifice to Him; they are called "soldiers," in order to inspire them with courage to fight the good fight of faith. In these words we have a singular description of God's faithful people—a description often intimated in the Book, but only here clearly stated. They are called His

“hidden ones ;” and of all the names by which the humble, earnest Christian is known, I know of none more likely to cheer his heart or increase his faith than this.

It implies the safety of God's people. The perfect law of God shelters the perfectly just and loyal ; but the sinner, having broken the law, is exposed to the justice and the wrath of God. The conscience of the wrongdoer tells him, in language that cannot be misread, that he has put himself outside the law—just as a criminal makes himself an outlaw, undefended by the laws of the land in which he lives. Out of God and away from Him, man is exposed, without screen or shelter, to the storms of conscience, the tempests of sorrow, the blast of death, the winter of judgment and of doom. All round the world this shelterless condition is felt. Adam felt it, and tried to hide himself among the trees. The heathen fears the anger of the gods, and screens himself by cruel offerings to idols of wood and stone. Self-righteousness makes a fancied refuge for itself, but all in vain ; the soul of the sinner has no refuge, knows no shelter, owns no home. But God Himself hath opened a hiding-place : His own infinite mercy, as manifest in the atoning death of Christ. Hence the glorious prophecy concerning Jesus—“A Man shall be a hiding-place from the wind and a covert from

the tempest; the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Into this shelter, by faith, believers have fled for refuge. The hope set before them in the Gospel has become a strong tower, into which they have run and are safe. That is what Toplady means when he sings—

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee."

That is what Charles Wesley means when he sings—

"Jesu, lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly."

That is what he means when he prays—

"Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,  
Till the storm of life be past."

And that is what David means when he says, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." There are many who are not hidden, not sheltered, not safe. Is there a question under heaven equal in interest to this? How can you, how dare you, live a moment consciously exposed to wrath and trouble, sickness, death and judgment, with never a shelter for your soul? I read the other day of a couple of children who had wandered on to the track of a railway. They had strayed into a deep cutting, and the elder heard the rattle of an approaching train;

seizing the hand of her little brother, she led him to a hollow scooped out in the rocky wall, and as the express train thundered by, the engine-driver saw the child pressed with his face to the rock and the elder girl standing before him, in close contact, so that the awful storm of peril swept harmless by. From my soul, I commend that example to you. There is peril—sure, real, near—

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

“Thy hidden ones.” It implies the concealment of the Christian. The world admires what is great, high, prominent, and imposing; but the godly are for the most part hidden, unnoted, and unknown. They are not appreciated. The spirit of the world is at enmity with them—refuses to rank them among those whom it delights to honour. It altogether undervalues them, and has little but sneers, contumely, and contempt to give. It calls them fanatics, or hypocrites, or people with crotchets, and at the best regards them as well-meaning weaklings, who may be quietly let alone. The Christian lives outside its fashions, customs, and favourite pursuits. The Christian is indifferent to all its pomps and vanities, its pleasures and its pride. Hence he is not held in estimation; and the world's patronage and its prizes, so freely

scattered among its favourites, are not for him. Your newspapers will devote column after column to the theatre or the race-course ; but the briefest paragraphs will serve for the doings of the Churches or the brave work of the missionary, whose lot it is to act the hero off the stage, and to remain little and unknown. Fame's loud trumpet is not for the Christian. He is a hidden one ; and the holier his conduct, and the humbler his character, and the Christlier his life, the more is he hidden in the shadow, the less is he appreciated by the unthinking crowd.

Besides this, the bulk of God's people in this world are hidden in the obscurity of their condition in life. It is comparatively true in these days, as in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called." There is ever an intersprinkling of notables, and these are increasing more and more ; there is, here and there and yonder, in the garden of God, an oak, a pine, a cedar ; but, in the main, Christianity dwells among the brushwood. It is composed of the rank and file, and has its dwelling, as it had in Christ's time, in the homes of the poor. While Elijah was hanging about the court, bearding Ahab and contending with the queen Jezebel and the priesthood of Baal, he thought he was alone in loyalty to God. He did not know that there were seven thousand

who bowed no knee to Baal, but were true and faithful in the dark and cloudy day. These were scattered in the rural towns and country villages, or in the lowlier quarters of city life. What Solomon said in his day is also true of this: The Lord's princes are on foot, and they who hold communion with heaven live in the valleys, and not on the hill-tops of social life. But the humble violets and other modest flowers of fragrance and of beauty have a wonderful effect on the spring air; and none may tell what is the subtle force and flavour exhaled under cottage eaves, among hard-handed toilers, the sons and daughters of poverty, whose influence is felt for good, though largely unnoted by the world's dim, purblind eye. Do you remember those fine lines of Cowper's?—

“Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,  
Pillow and bobbins all her little store,  
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night  
Lies down in peace, both heart and pocket light.  
She—for her humble sphere by nature fit—  
Has little understanding, and no wit;  
Yet knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—  
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;  
And in that charter reads, with sparkling eyes,  
Her title to a treasure in the skies.  
O happy peasant! O unhappy bard!  
His the mere tinsel: hers the rich reward.  
He, praised, perhaps, for ages yet to come:  
She, never heard of half a mile from home.  
He, lost in errors his vain heart prefers:  
She, safe in the simplicity of hers.”

“Thy hidden ones.” Some of God’s children are hidden by persecution. In the olden time, as the Book itself informs us, the faithful ones were hidden among rocks, and dens, and caves of the earth. In some lands this is true to-day; and in our own land, and everywhere, the Lord has many true and faithful ones who dare not fully manifest their loyalty or publicly profess their attachment to their God. The pressure of circumstances and surroundings lies very heavy on them. The hostile influence of relatives and of hard and irreligious employers, the tenure and lease on which they hold the earning of their daily bread—all these things prevent many from an open alliance with the Church and people of God. I wonder, in this big, cruel, selfish London, how many there are who, like Joseph of Arimathea, are secret disciples for fear—not of the Jews, but of the husband, parent, employer, or other powerful influence, which makes them secret martyrs of their Lord. I often come into contact with this form of persecution; and I claim an interest in the prayers of the godly for those who are hidden under pressure of threats and menaces, and vainly hunger for a Christian fellowship they may not share. If I speak to-day to any such, let me ask them to remember that the Lord’s hidden ones are all included

in the golden band of His matchless love and care.

Then there are many loyal and faithful disciples of Jesus who are hidden by a constitutional diffidence. They shrink from any and all publicity. A native timidity and a retiring tendency keeps them silent, keeps them in the background, keeps them hindmost in the ranks of God's elect. Their one desire is to creep to Christ, trembling and unnoticed, and touch the hem of his garment, dearly hoping that not a soul is looking on. I am afraid that this large class gets but scant sympathy from more robust and more self-assertive natures. We who are strong are not too ready to bear the infirmities of the weak, and deprecation, rebuke, and condemnation are apt to fall glibly from our lips. Did we but know all the circumstances and all the facts, we should sympathise and encourage, and not condemn. There are people who have "no nerves," as the saying is, who show but little mercy to the highly-strung, sensitive souls, whose painful tension they cannot appreciate and understand. But "He knoweth our frame;" and no one makes such liberal and considerate allowances for weakness and infirmity as He. These hidden ones, quiet, silent, and reserved, may be doing a holy work in secret spheres, in the home circle, in the private closet of devotion, or through the hands of others.



Then, again, the Lord has His hidden ones, who are hidden by age, by sickness, and by the iron wall of duty, from which they cannot, ought not to break away. Depend upon it, this is a large and noble army. In the chamber of the invalid, on the bed of pain, there lies many a gem of purest ray serene. Imprisoned by paralysis, or any other of the thousand ailments to which our poor flesh is heir, many soldiers of the Cross lie chafing their bonds in enforced idleness, who fain would be doing some good work for God. Many a gallant hero and heroine bend their white hairs in silent submission to a mere pensioner's lot, having had to retire from the front by reason of the weight of years. These are sadly too liable to be forgotten by their stronger and younger comrades and by the Church they served. But they are all His "hidden ones;" and they who are lying in the hospital or wounded in the tent, as well as the warrior on the field, are all alike on the roll-call, and in the day of general victory and reward will gladly answer "Here!"

Then I would not forget how many of the Lord's loyal disciples are hidden from each other by the thick, man-spun veils of opposing creeds. There is a sad and lamentable tendency to be dubious and suspicious when people cannot repeat our shibboleth or indorse our form of

faith. Orthodoxy—save the mark!—is very hard on heterodoxy, and fails to see the hidden good, because its garment is not of our favourite cut and colour. We are sadly too apt to get into the chair of judgment—the stool of repentance would suit us a great deal better. God seeth not as man seeth; and He has a countless host of hidden ones, good at heart and true according to their light, among all the creeds that divide the babbling earth.

And then, once again, how many of God's hidden ones are hid away in the shelter of the restful grave. They have passed out of sight—many of them out of memory; but there's is sacred clay; they are the wards of God. We often say, "Our fathers, where are they? Our friends, what has become of them?" They are God's hidden ones. They lie under His charge, waiting, "waiting for the adoption—to wit, the redemption of the body." To them the grave is a hiding-place, a secret jewel-chamber. Do you remember Montgomery's words about the Christian's grave?—

"Couch of tranquil slumber  
For the weary brow;  
Couch of the faint and weary,  
Sweetly resting now.

Turf of the shaded churchyard,  
Warder of the clay,

Watch the secret treasure  
Till the waking day.

Watch the quiet sleepers,  
Guard each placid form,  
Shielding from the weather,  
Hiding from the storm.

Hide it kindly, fondly,—  
To cherish, not destroy ;  
Clasp it as a mother  
Clasps her nestling joy.

Guard the precious treasure—  
Guard it, faithful tomb ;  
Keep it all unrifled  
Till the Master come."

"Thy hidden ones." The words intimate God's appreciation of His people. *Thy* hidden ones. They are His property. They are His purchased possession. In His wonderful prayer to the Father, just before His passion, our blessed Saviour rejoices in His co-partnership with the Father in owning and having the godly for Himself: "All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine." His own! Here is also the idea of individual knowledge of them. *Thy hidden ones*. Not a mass, but separate units—ones ; I, thou, he, she. Oh, the glory and the grace of this definite reference to me! Here is the idea of value. Nobody troubles to hide what is counted worthless. It either has an intrinsic value, like gold, or a circumstantial value, like an old letter or a lock of hair. Believers in Jesus are dear to

Him, precious to Him. He hides them, guards them, keeps watch over them. "Where do you keep your jewels?" some one asked of a Roman matron. "In my heart," said she, and straight brought her children into view. They were her precious things, hid in her heart. "Thy hidden ones!"

Lastly, these words intimate the ultimate manifestation of God's people. Hidden, are they? Well, but "He that hides can find." People do not hide things to be forgotten; people do not hide things to be destroyed. They are hidden to be reproduced. The jewels are hidden in the casket till they are wanted; then they are brought out to flash upon the breast and to beautify the brow. The royal regalia is hid away under lock and key until another coronation-day comes round.

Do you remember what is said of the people of God in the Book of Malachi?—"They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I number up My jewels." What does He mean? They are His now—His hidden ones. They shall be known as Mine; they shall be acknowledged by Me in the presence of angels and men. "I will confess them," says Jesus, "before My Father and the holy angels." Then as a bridegroom decketh himself for marriage, as a bride adorneth herself with jewels, so will God

bring out His hidden ones to flash around the splendours of His throne, to gem the crown and diadem of His glory, and to reflect the light of life and immortality for evermore. What a revolution will take effect that day! Then shall the lowliest on earth become the loftiest in heaven; then shall the humblest of saints become the highest in glory. What a change from the contempt, and the sickness, and the poverty of earth to the honours, and health, and wealth of heaven! "When I get to heaven," said good John Newton, "I shall be surprised at three things: I shall wonder to see many absent that I expected to find there; I shall wonder to see many there whom I did not expect to meet; but the greatest wonder will be to see such a poor sinner as myself there." O Christian men and women—this glorious and transcendent honour shall come to you! Hidden to-day, you shall be discovered to-morrow. Bear your trials, fight your battles, carry your crosses, wait your appointed time in hopeful patience, and your change will come. This corruptible shall put on incorruption—this mortal shall put on immortality, and you shall be changed. How often you have heard the words at the grave-side, as some hidden one has been covered up out of sight, and your tearful eye was too dim to see its glorious meaning—"Be faithful unto death;

I will give thee a crown of life." I appeal to thee, O unsaved sinner! Thou who hast no Saviour, no shelter, no hiding-place,—What wilt thou do when the storms blow? What wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan? The storm is rising, the tempest is at hand, the evil days are coming nigh, when in despair thou shalt cry, "I have no pleasure in them." Listen! "A man shall be a hiding-place, a covert from the tempest, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." What man?—The Man Christ Jesus; the Rock of Ages. That shelter, that refuge is open now—only now—not to-morrow. Come to Jesus. There you shall be hidden—hidden for a little—until the revelation dawns. Said a venerable old saint, who was hidden in a workhouse, "Oh, what a change! Out of a poor-house into heaven!" Come and look at her:—

"Tread softly; bow the head;  
In reverent silence bow.  
No passing bell doth toll,  
Yet an immortal soul  
Is passing now.

Stranger, however great,  
With lowly reverence bow.  
There's one in that poor shed,  
One on that paltry bed,  
Greater than thou.

O change! oh, wondrous change!  
Burst are the prison bars.

This moment there—so low,  
So agonised !—and now  
Beyond the stars.

O change ! stupendous change !  
There lies the soulless clod.  
The sun eternal breaks,  
The new immortal wakes—  
Wakes with her God !”

## X.

*MY DREAMS.*

“There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets.”—DAN. ii. 28.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, King of Babylon, was sorely troubled by a vision of the night. The dream had gone from him, but although the scene had faded from his memory, it had left behind an impression so deep, a melancholy so profound, a horror so intense, that the monarch was filled with anxiety for the reproduction of his dream, and an explanation of the events it foretold.

The wise men of the age, the chief authorities on all questions of a mysterious kind, were convened by the terrified king, who demanded that they should relate his dreams which he had utterly forgotten, and furnish the interpretation he so much desired. One and all declared their inability to do the former, and asked the king to describe the vision, in order that they might supply the latter. They acknowledged that the secrets of the mind were beyond their ken.



Baffled and disappointed, the angry despot doomed them at once to death, and the captain of the guard was commanded to execute the king's decree. Daniel, a captive of Judah, who, together with three fellow-captives, had been set apart to study all the wisdom of the Chaldæan schools, and who was therefore included in the fatal edict, promptly intervened, asked for extended time, and promised to satisfy his king's commands.

The four captive Jews made prayerful appeal to God. An answer was vouchsafed, the vision unfolded itself to Daniel, the interpretation followed, a joyful thanksgiving was offered to God, and the young stranger went in and stood before the king, saying, "The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men show unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets."

The whole narrative affords us an excellent illustration of the limits of human reason, and the necessity of a revelation from God; and in these days, when both science and philosophy are employed to cast doubts on revelation; when the "wise men" of our time would decry the Word of God, uncrown the Christ, and bind the lordly symbol above the blinded eyes of human reason, it is well and necessary for all lovers of the Gospel to give a clear and settled

answer to those who question the hope that is in us.

I.—THERE ARE SECRETS, THE REVELATION OF WHICH IS OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE TO HUMANITY.

I, also, in common with all mortals, have dreamed a dream, ay, dreams, dreams of God, of responsibility, of happiness, of immortality; but they have gone from me; the pictures are blurred, the ideas are indistinct, and, as in the case of the royal dreamer, they have left behind a hazy half-consciousness that does but harass and perplex, and at times brings me deep depression, an unspoken dread, an anxious mind, and a troubled heart!

1. *I dream of the existence of a God.* I have a dim consciousness of a great First Cause, an innate conviction independent of creeds, and which defies the impious foot of Atheism to crush it, or the breath of a cold Materialism to wither it away. I see around me a thousand irresistible tokens of His creating power and wisdom. He is my Maker, hence my Master! the Creator and Maintainer of the Universe, hence the Universal King! My lot, my destiny, is in His hands. To Him I am responsible. On Him I depend. Who is He? How does He regard me? I want to know Him. I desire to

please Him. I would avoid His displeasure! I would secure His favour. For the sake of my happiness, my life, it is essential to me to know my God. Oh, thou Fount of Being! Lord of Life! Controller of Destiny! Thou whose will is obeyed alike by stars that roll and flowers that bloom. Who art Thou, Lord? What is Thy will, that I may do it? Where is Thy will, that I may read it? What are the conditions of Thine approval, that I may obtain it? I have faint dreams of God, of truth, and right, and duty. Tell me, ye wise men, "Who is the Ruler, and what the rule of life?"

2. I also have dreamed a dream, and, like the vision of the king, it has left an intermittent horror on my soul. *I am conscious of wrong-doing.* I am sensible of the existence of a certain something, which condemns or approves, accuses or excuses, according to the nature of my deeds. This "conscience" which is native to my soul, condemns me, upbraids me with my guilt, and saddens me with the responsibility of my own "I will!" All peoples, all individuals, have this conscious wrong. The heathen deprecate the vengeance of offended deities by gifts and pain and sacrifice and death; and one who wrote thousands of years ago, says:—

"Guilt still alarms, and conscience, ne'er asleep,  
Wounds with incessant strokes : not loud, but deep ;

Trust me, no tortures that the poets feign  
Can match the fierce, unutterable pain  
He feels, who, day and night devoid of rest,  
Carries his own accuser in his breast."

God is angry with me, and justly. It defies argument. What can I do? Will He crush me like a moth? Must His justice take its course? How can a man be just before God? This guilt oppresses me, this sense of sin embitters my life and fills me with unspoken dread. "O wretched man that I am! who can deliver me from the body of this death?" Is there an interpreter, one among a thousand who will deliver me from going down into the pit, saying, "I have found a ransom?"

3. Like Nebuchadnezzar, I also have dreamed a dream, but it has gone from me. *I dream of a possible rest.* Tossed by the restless surges of the sea of life, my bruised and beaten spirit has blurred visions of happiness and peace. Toiling and moiling amid the cares and anxieties of time, wrestling with ever-multiplying trials, my weary spirit gets fitful and broken glimpses of a state of quiet. I strive to bear my disappointments with a manly spirit, but I miserably fail. I am sad and weak, and unable to dry my tears. I hanker after contentment. I am a searcher after happiness, and my search is vain. All men seek it, but gold cannot buy it; honour cannot

invest me with it; pleasure is a false and gilded substitute; I dream, and the world dreams of a one time golden age, but it has gone from me. I want to know;—I ask the “wise men” of the age: I ask, with a tear in my eye and a certain choking in the throat, “Is there a possible happiness for my poor soul to-day?”

“Sweet Peace, where dost thou dwell?”

There be many that say, and my heart’s cry mingles with the rest, “Who will show us any good?”

4. Like the king of Babylon, I also dream a dream, and it fills me with anxiety and unrest. *I dream of an “after life.”* My mind refuses the idea of dying like the beasts below me. I am repelled at the thought of annihilation. I shall live!—this is the innate instinct of every human mind. The conviction is universal. The Red Indian looks forward to the happier hunting-grounds; the negro carries food to the graves of the dead that their spirits may awake and eat. All round the world man holds the faith in immortality. I do not now try to prove the future existence of the soul, I declare it to be an underlying faith that can never be overmastered! Then, what is there awaiting me in that unseen future? Beyond the dark river, whose solemn surges fall upon mine ear, what are the mysteries

of being? What is that bourne from which no traveller returns? I dare not die as sceptic Hobbes did, crying, "I am taking a leap into the dark!" My soul is horrified at such a venture. Oh, mighty sons of science and philosophy, hold your torches over this profound! This question stirs my soul to the depths. "Soon as from earth I go what will become of me?" Can I secure a blissful immortality?

I submit to you that these are primal questions of man; and while these secrets are unrevealed, these problems unsolved, what good will my birthright do me? I cannot live by bread alone. I cannot subsist on theories and propositions. This I, this Ego that dwells within me, is spiritual, and must have food in harmony with its nature and consistent with its needs. Nature speaks to my senses, and her voice is sweet. The sciences speak to my intellect, and it rejoices in the light. But who will speak to my soul? Who will talk to my heart? Who will recover and interpret my dreams and bring me satisfaction and repose? Oh, ye "wise men," ye sages of to-day: I sit at your feet! I open my ears to your words. My anxious soul awaits your answer to these problems. Once satisfied on these matters, acquainted with God, and Law, and Grace, and Peace, and Heaven, my poor life will be ennobled—my heart shall be glad, my

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glory shall rejoice ! I will wander graveward under a sky spanned with promise, my flesh shall rest in hope, and my whole powers shall combine to bless my Creator for the splendid gift of life. But leave me ignorant of these vital matters and my life is chaos, existence is a riddle and a curse, death is a horror, and the mysterious afterward a terror and a woe ! and all the things accounted precious by the worldly-wise, all the splendid discoveries of science, all the wondrous researches of philosophy, all the triumphs of art, all are to me mere chaff and dust and vanity unless first you give me God !

“So runs my dream, but what am I ?  
An infant crying in the night,—  
An infant crying for the light,—  
And with no language but a cry !

I falter where I firmly trod,  
And, falling 'neath my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar stairs  
That slope through darkness up to God,—

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
On Him I think is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust some larger hope !”

## II.—THE REVELATION OF THESE SECRETS ALTOGETHER SURPASSES HUMAN WISDOM.

Nebuchadnezzar called to his aid the “wise men” of his kingdom, the philosophers and

scientists of the day, men who professed to read the secrets of the stars. To these the king stated his difficulty: they honestly confessed that the thing was beyond their skill, and that such deep secrets of the spirit that is in man "are known only to the gods whose dwelling is not with the flesh." This, I submit, is the position occupied by the wise men of to-day as regards these solemn problems of the soul. In the presence of my questioning heart, Science is voiceless, Philosophy makes an effort to reply, flings a little border light upon the mystery, flounders in a sea of contradictions, then lapses into silence, and the oracle is dumb.

The Astronomer talks with me on the composition of the sun, he tells the number of the stars, calculates their distances, and calls them by their names. He so maps out the heavens that the aspiring mind may sail along the blue, coast around every constellation, tarry at each revolving planet, and steer unhindered through all the paths of space. But the azure scroll contains for him no transcript of the moral law of God. He knows of no star to guide the spirit over the sea of life. He cannot tell me by what law my wandering soul may gravitate towards Deity, and circle in the orbit of truth and duty around the Eternal God.

The Geologist, who digs among the deep foun-



dations of the earth, can read the wondrous scroll of the earth's biography; can echo in mine ear the testimony of the rocks; but he finds no rock on which my restless soul can settle and build its hopes of heaven! Among the subterranean caverns that hide the relics of extinct creation he finds no elements out of which to build the true primeval man,—no secret hiding-place for a guilty spirit,—no long-secreted fountain or internal fire for the purging of a marred and mistaken life! If he make the granite pillars of the globe to echo with the earnest inquiry for the Holy Grail, "The depth saith it is not in me!"

The Zoologist thrills me with his descriptions of animated nature, from the ponderous Behemoth who drinks up rivers with his mouth to the polypus that frets its little life upon the sea-swept rock, but among all the herds of the forest he hath found no blood of atonement for the remission of my sins. He discourses on all the winged denizens of air, from the eagle with the sweeping pinions to the sparrow chirping amid cottage eaves, but he hath found no single messenger who can bring to human hearts, fearsome and sorrowful, the true olive-branch of peace!

The Botanist, splendid sage, expounds the secrets of the vegetable kingdom, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop upon the wall, from the tropic palm to the lichen amid northern

snows; but, tell me, glorious magician! canst thou tell me where the herb heart's-ease grows, to soothe the moral sores that run in the night of sorrow; the balm that can minister to a mind diseased—a tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations?

The Mathematician hath a marvellous power over numbers, and proudly calls his, *par excellence*, the exact and certain science; but can he calculate the unknown quantity of the price required to redeem a law-condemned life? Can he solve this greatest problem—How the divine and parallel lines of Justice and Mercy may be made to meet and bind in the sure circle of salvation my sin-endangered soul?

The Geographer's eye ranges over the wide surface of the globe from China to Peru, from the scorching equator to the shivering poles. He explores the broadest continents, and his adventurous keel ploughs the virgin waves of remotest seas. But he hath never found the river of life among the unknown hills! Oh, ye discoverers, say—

“Have ye found a land of rest?  
Some golden-sanded shore?  
Some glorious islands of the blest,  
Where mortals weep no more?

Where weary man may find  
The bliss for which he sighs,  
Where sorrow never lives,  
Where pleasure never dies?

Tell me, O traveller, tell,  
As far and wide ye roam,  
Have ye found the happy land,  
The soul's eternal home ?”

If we were to travel thus around all the circle of the sciences, if we questioned thus at the portals of every school and system of philosophy, the answer of the Babylonian astrologers must come alike from all : “ There is not a man upon earth that can show the king's matter, and there is none other that can show it except the gods whose dwelling is not with flesh.” Great and precious and important are all these in their legitimate domain. All honour to the men who patiently study the mysteries of nature, and explore the secrets of mind ; but there are higher studies, there are grander laws, there are surpassing interests, and to pursue these we must follow other guides, we must seek a higher light. Discarding all secondary illumination, we must go to the Fount of Light and utter our humble prayer to the Highest,—“ Teach me Thy statutes, even wondrous things out of Thy law.” Let human wisdom honestly avow its limits, and neither dispute my dream, nor sneer at the simplicity of the dreamer, nor seek to foist a mean and materialistic interpretation on my soul, but in the candid language of the Babylonian sages confess its ignorance, and then

reverently bowing before the Divine Prophet of the Highest, the Word made flesh, say, "Behold, a greater than earth's Solomon is here." Then science will be a thing holy and Divine, philosophy will be irradiate with godliness and truth, and the marvellous magicians of our time will stand high among the benefactors of our race.

"Who loves not 'knowledge?' Who shall rail  
Against her beauty? May she mix  
With men and prosper! Who shall fix  
Her pillars? Let her work prevail!

But on her forehead sits a fire—  
She sets her forward countenance,  
And leaps into the future chance,  
Submitting all things to desire.

Half grown, as yet a child, and vain,  
She cannot fight the fear of death.  
What is she, cut from love and faith,  
But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of Demons, fiery hot to burst  
All barriers in her onward race  
For power? Let her know her place—  
She is the second, not the First!

A higher hand must make her mild,  
If all be not in vain, and guide  
Her footsteps, moving side by side,  
With *Wisdom*, like a younger child!"

### III.—THESE GREAT SECRETS, SO IMPORTANT FOR HUMANITY TO UNDERSTAND, HAVE BEEN REVEALED BY GOD HIMSELF!

Daniel received the desired knowledge direct from heaven. Even so hath God revealed these

great mysteries to the human mind. He hath reproduced the dreams that had gone from us, hath showed the great necessities of our moral nature, and hath produced in His glorious Gospel an efficient satisfaction for every yearning of the human heart. Human wisdom says, "His dwelling is not with flesh!" Human need says, "Will God in very deed dwell upon the earth?" And Christianity responds, "The tabernacle of God is with men!"

Jesus Christ is God's answer to man's questions, and the answer is redemptive and complete. Jesus Christ lived. The infidel cannot, does not now deny it. Jesus Christ assumed Divine authority, declared Himself a messenger from God to man, nay, declared Himself Divine. His history is recorded. His biography is here. The facts are incontrovertible, and scepticism in these days contents itself by giving materialistic interpretations of them. Hear Him, "I am He who was to come!" And He points with steady finger to a thousand prophecies uttered centuries before His advent, detailing with historic exactness all the peculiar features of His birth, His life, His work, His death, His burial, with such marvellous display of prescience that omniscience only could have given it birth. It was God's pre-provided testimony to the royalty of His embassy, the holiness of His character, the

authenticity of His claims, and the divinity and truth of His words.

Hear Him! "All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth. The Father hath sent Me, and the words that I speak are not Mine, but the Father's that sent Me." If this testimony is true, we have the voice of God. Then He produces another class of credentials, and says, "Believe Me for My works' sake!" His marvels, wrought by His own inherent power, compel even His enemies to say, "We believe that Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man could do the works that Thou doest except God were with him!"

"When God came down from heaven, the living God,  
What signs and wonders marked His stately way!  
The winds brake out in music where He trod;  
Shone in the heavens a brighter, softer day.

The dumb began to speak, the blind to see,  
And the lame leaped, and pain and darkness fled;  
The mourner's sunken eye grew bright with glee,  
And from the tomb arose the wondering dead!"

You remember how they brought to Christ one sick of the palsy, and, unable otherwise to reach Him, they let the poor sufferer down through the uncovered roof in the bed whereon he lay. The light of living faith gleamed in the sufferer's eye, and the heart of the Saviour, leaping at once to such a call, said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee!" The lookers-on murmured, say-

ing, "This is blasphemy. Who can forgive sin but God only?" "Which is easier," said the Saviour, "to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk?" Both required the intervention of a power Divine: "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power . . . He saith unto the sick of the palsy, Rise up and walk!" Leaping from the discarded couch, the hitherto palsied, helpless wretch stood up before them, stalwart, hale, and vigorous, and, with a smile of speechless gratitude, gathered up his bed and bounded home!

Beside all this, a voice from heaven endorsed His claims, and bade us listen: "This is My beloved Son, hear Him." Nature reeled and darkened when He submitted to the crowning dishonour of death, and He was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead!

Come and hear Him, then! His lips are touched by an unkindled fire. He speaks as never man spake, for He is "the Power of God and the Wisdom of God." He hath come to answer the cry of humanity. Sit at His feet and propound your heart-questions. His answer is prompt and clear and loving; the tones are music, and the words are bliss. Do you ask Him of God and your relation to Him? He slays your fears in a moment—"When ye pray,

say, Our Father, which art in heaven." Do you ask what is the law of God, the rule of life? He says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." In the misery of your guilt do you ask, "What must I do to be saved?" He says, "The Son of Man shall be lifted up, and whosoever believeth in Him shall have everlasting life." Do you ask Him for rest and peace? He says, "Come unto Me, and ye shall find rest unto your soul." Do you ask for power and guidance, comfort and aid? "I will send unto you the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, who shall guide you into all truth." Afraid of death, do you ask for help and victory? "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whoso liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Shrink-  
ing from the unknown future, do you say, "Soon as from earth I go, what will become of me?" He says, "I go to prepare a place for you: in My Father's house are many mansions, and I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am there shall My servants be."

Oh, sirs! surely these are glad tidings, glad tidings of great joy! Oh! my Saviour, I will trust Thee! I will listen and believe! My fears fade, my doubts vanish, my terrors die! I will cast anchor here! "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon



earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

Here, then, lies the key to unlock all secrets. We are, by the mediation of Christ, brought back to God—to God, the true home of the soul. Offended God and offending man at one and reconciled, and Jesus Christ the healer of the breach! Strong in the merit, love, and grace of a dying, living, mediating Saviour—"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him even unto that day." Brothers! accept Christ! Take Him to your heart.

"In Him your pardoned soul shall boast  
More blessings than your father lost!"

He will endow you with knowledge, pardon, peace, and immortality. He will invest your soul with the nature and privilege of sonship with God. He will elevate you to a moral semblance to Himself, and then crown His consecrated kings and priests to God with that eternal felicity of holiness which fills the Deity itself with joy.

From Nebuchadnezzar went forth the edict that, should the secret remain unrevealed, the men must die. "There is but one decree for you." That edict was a cruel wrong, a strict

injustice. But that decree has also gone out from God. There is but one decree for you if this divinely-interpreted secret is not made clear to you; and this decree is just. You have the dream and the interpretation; you have the statement of your need, and you have the Gospel that will meet it to the full. Christ is the Way, the Truth, the Life! He has answered all questions, so that a child may understand them. I speak alike to sage and clown, to the learned and the lowly. If you reject this great salvation, so adapted to your need, so attested as to its authority, so simple in its terms, so mighty in its transformations, so glorious in its results, so tremendous in its cost—there is but one decree for you—"He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned!" There is no faltering in the condition, no ambiguity in the terms. How can you escape? Apart from Christ what can you do? Where will you go? Here is a wound and no cure, a storm and no covert, a condemnation and no shrift, a dread eternity and no escape! Alas for us if this were all! Alas for us if the slope of natural religion, the ladder of science, were the only stair to lead us up to God! But where natural religion abandons us, where science at its highest leaves us, where philosophy in its purest form forsakes us—then revealed religion takes

us up. When the light of nature waxes dim amid the unstirred gloom of moral miseries, inspiration flashes her heaven-kindled torch upon the dark, and shows the way to holiness and immortality. When human wisdom founders in the deep, leaving all hands to perish, the ark of Christianity floats safely on the flood, rescues the shipwrecked crew, and, over storm and billow, through night and tempest, bears them to the glorious port of God.

# XI.

## *ECHOES FROM AFAR.*

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."—PROV. xxv. 25.

AN Asiatic traveller tell us that one day as he was crossing a desert, he and his party found the bodies of two men laid upon the sand, besides the carcass of a camel. By their side lay a small bag of dried dates, two leathern bottles, quite empty, and on further examination he noted that the stomach of the dead camel had been cut open, as if to get at the water which, as is well known, that animal can carry on its desert journeys for a considerable time. A further glance at the swollen lips and blackened tongues of the men made it evident that they had died enduring the most agonising pains of thirst. "I was much stirred," says the traveller, "when I found that both the men had, in the belt around their waist, a large store of jewels of different kinds, which they had doubtless been crossing the desert to sell in the markets of

Persia. I warrant the poor wretches would have bartered many a jewel for a few delicious draughts of water." That, I think, may be taken as an illustration of the first portion of my text, "water to a thirsty soul."

Away yonder in the valley of Hebron, and underneath the oaks of Mamre, dwells an aged man, whose life has been one continuous experience of change and trial. Amongst the saddest of his sorrows is the loss of his favourite son, who has been torn to pieces by some beasts of prey. Ever since then the old man's hair has whitened fast, and still he sighs and frets for the absence of his darling, dead and gone. The time is evening, and the old man sits alone sunning himself at his tent door, thinking of his dear, dead Rachel, and of her hapless son. He is roused from his reverie by the approach of a band of travellers, dusty and weary wayfarers, leading their laden cattle. "Welcome back!" says the old man, casting an anxious eye upon them to see that none were missing. "What news from Egypt?" Then Reuben steps to the front, while all the rest wear a look of sympathetic satisfaction, and says, "Father, Joseph is not dead but living, and is Governor of Egypt!" The old man's face pales; he gasps for breath. Wonder has robbed him of the power of speech. Slowly his mind takes in the tidings, and at last

he cries, with joyous sobs, "My son Joseph is yet alive!" That, I think, will serve as an illustration of the latter half of my text,—“Good news from a far country.”

“As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”

“Good news!” why, that is the very expression used by the angel when he appeared to the watching shepherds above the plains of Bethlehem, “Behold, I bring you glad tidings.” Glad tidings! Good news! Good news brought by the angel of the Lord, who rode thitherward on the glory of the Lord, so that the messenger and his news came down from *heaven*—the “far country,”—to these poor shepherds, and the “far country,” too, to us poor children of the earth to-day.

1. It is a far country, possibly, as measured by *distance*, this heaven that we talk about. We are accustomed to think of it as being exceeding high and lifted up, beyond the stars indeed. We have the idea that the new-fledged souls of the saints when freed from these earthly shells do wing their flight through unmeasured space to find their home in the land which is afar off. I greatly question the truth of this prevalent idea. I prefer to believe myself that the dwelling-place of Deity is near at hand, that the angels of God are near neighbours, that the sainted dead are

separated from us only by the thick, dense, fleshly veil which envelops our free soul, so that we can neither feel, nor hear, nor see. The poet Wordsworth says, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," and the more the Christian gets back the child-like spirit, the nearer he feels himself to have come again to that Mount Zion of which the Apostle speaks, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and the glories of the Father's house. Christian, give that thought lodgment, will you, that heaven lies near to the habitations of the just.

"Heaven is dearest, heaven is clearest,  
Heaven lies nearest the holiest soul !  
Inside the heart of him, really a part of him,  
Round him the waters of Paradise roll."

2. But heaven is a "far country," more especially from the fact that it is far away beyond our comprehension. The minutest organisms in creation are strangely beautiful, entrancing the wondering eye when seen through a microscope; but though the same objects are close beside us, round about us, they are far away at impossible distances from the naked eye. So heaven is a far country, because it lies remote from our power of apprehension. It is so utterly far beyond our experience, so surpasses our comprehension, so outstrips our thought and conception, that even the aid of revelation does

but give us dim glimpses of its distant splendours, does but cast a faint aurora glow on the far horizon, and that is for the most part dashed and dimmed by the fogs of time and sense. We read of trees of life, and rivers of crystal, and seas of glass, and crowns of glory, and harps of gold, and robes of white, and mansions of light; but even while we read them, we are conscious that all this is but a poor human reflection of the ungraspable, unsearchable glory that is to be revealed.

3. Heaven is a "far country," because we are by nature so disqualified from inhabiting it. The next alderman on the rota is very near the lord mayor's chair of honour, but to the ragged and unkempt street arab it is "a far country," even though he sits upon the mansion steps. The distance is measured by the unfitness of the case. But vastly greater is the gulf that divides poor polluted humanity from the pure and holy precincts of heaven! We speak of the *fall* of man, and this is the measure of it—a fall from Paradise to perdition—a fall that only power Divine can span. Speaking of certain Christian converts, Paul says, "Once ye were afar off, but now are ye *brought nigh*;" and to cover the tremendous distance between these two moral states, it needed all the power of the Godhead, all the sore travail of the Saviour from the cradle to the cross!



Heaven, then, is a "far country," and from this far country good news has come. Now, under ordinary circumstances, news from any far country is matter of real interest to us. 1. If, for instance, it is a strange land as well as a far one, a land altogether unlike our own. In everybody there is more or less a love of the wonderful, the curious, and the novel. You remember how eagerly David Livingstone's story was listened to, with what pleasure and interest his thrilling narrative was read. And not only from the far country, shadowed by the palm-trees and scorched by the tropic suns, is good news pleasant and delightful, but the stories of Franklin, M'Clintock, Parry, and others, concerning the far-off regions of the North, home of eternal ice and snow, are equally seized upon by the hunger for information. But, as I have already said, heaven is the most wonderful land of all! And right through the ages man has been peering and wondering, and dreaming about that vast land of the unseen. The "dark continent," unexplored Africa has been called. But the true dark continent is heaven—dark, that is to say, in Milton's sense—"dark through excess of light." Even the little children want to know something about heaven. The charming child-song by Mrs. Hemans puts into music all our wonderings about the land which is afar off;—

"I hear thee speak of the Better Land,  
 Thou call'st its children a happy band,  
 Mother ! oh, where is the radiant shore ?  
 Shall we not seek it and weep no more ?  
 Is it where the flower of the orange grows,  
 And the fireflies dance through the myrtle boughs ?  
     —Not there, not there, my child.

Is it where the feathery palm-trees rise,  
 And the date grows ripe under sunny skies ?  
 Or 'mid the green islands of glittering seas,  
 Where fragrant forests perfume the breeze,  
 And strange bright birds on starry wings  
 Bear the rich hues of all glorious things ?  
     —Not there, not there, my child.

Is it far away in some region old,  
 Where the rivers wander o'er sands of gold ?  
 Where the burning rays of the ruby shine,  
 Or the diamond lights up the secret mine,  
 And the pearl gleams forth from the coral strand—  
 Is it there, sweet mother, this better land ?  
     —Not there, not there, my child.

Eye hath not seen it, my gentle boy,  
 Ear hath not heard its deep songs of joy ;  
 Dreams cannot picture a world so fair—  
 Sorrow and death may not enter there ;  
 Time may not breathe on its fadeless bloom,  
 For beyond the clouds and beyond the tomb,  
     It is there, it is there, my child."

2. We delight to hear from a far country, too,  
 when it contains those who are near and dear  
 to us, as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the  
 Cape. How the very mention of these places  
 makes the mother to watch and listen ; for is it  
 not there that her emigrant son has gone to

settle; and is there any subject so full of interest to her? Let but a traveller come from his colonial home, where your friend or relative is located, and any good news he can tell you of them is indeed "as cold waters to a thirsty soul." Well, in the far country of which I speak, there is not one of us that has not interests of this kind, parents, partners, families, friends, all housed and homed, all settled and thrifty, all dwelling in this far, far country beyond the sea. Surely news from thence is amongst the most pleasant and refreshing experiences of our earthly lot—cold waters, indeed, to a thirsty soul.

3. News from a far country is profoundly interesting and acceptable, if it be a country in which we intend to live by-and-by; to which we ourselves are fully purposing to sail some day when the summons comes. We want to know all about our future home; and every competent authority, every credible witness, every narrative concerning it is welcomed with immense attention and delight. Well, you are all intending to emigrate to heaven. There is not one that does not expect some day to settle down in a new home somewhere or other on the banks of the crystal stream, the beautiful land on high. Surely, then, news of this far country, brought to you *from* the far country direct, should have

for you an overpowering interest, should stir your feelings to their depths, should be amongst your most peculiar delights—as cold waters to a thirsty soul.

Good news *has* come from this far country, the best and most glorious news that can fall on mortal ear. Angels have brought it. “Unto you is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” Jesus has brought it. “When ye pray, say, Our Father.” “Come to me, and I will give you rest.” “In my Father’s house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.” The Holy Spirit has brought it; holy men, moved by Him, wrote and spoke it, and within those sacred pages all the letters, messages, epistles, communications direct from the far country and its eternal King are registered and preserved, and are as true and new and fresh and living as when first they left the throne of God. In them is to be found all that ever can be needed to give us title-deeds, fitness, guidance, good cheer, and an abundant entrance into the far country and the presence of its glorious King. Further,—subtle, gracious, secret good news is brought from the far country now,—brought on the wings of the Holy Dove, brought into the closet of secret prayer, brought into the sanctuaries of worship, ay, by the fireside, into the mill, the shop, and the market, for still and ever

the good God whispers life and love into pious and trustful hearts. Am I going too far when I say that good news from the far country is still brought to us by our "sainted ones," who are now "those ministers of His that do His pleasure?" Surely if evil spirits are permitted to whisper their evil subtleties to tempt and to deceive; if those dark spirits are loosed from the pit to work us damage, it is no strain upon our faith to believe that good suggestions, happy thoughts, helpful influences and impulses are brought to us from the "far country," by the dear spirits whose love for us who are left behind can only be quickened and intensified in their nobler state of being.

Some years ago, a fisherman on our western coast was returning in his boat at evening from the patient toil of the day. His cottage lay on the shore of a creek, at the entrance to which stood certain rocks, easy enough to avoid in the day-time, but difficult in the dark. The night *was* dark, the mists hung heavily, and the tired toiler of the sea, bending at his oars, was fairly at a loss how to steer his boat. At this point, while his peril was great, he heard the voice of his little daughter, "Father, father!" Instinctively he turned his boat's head in that direction, saying, "Yes, my child." "Steer straight for me, father," she called; and then sang

loudly a familiar strain, so that the tones might be borne towards him through the mist and the gloom,—

“I’ll soon be at home over there,  
For the end of my journey I see ;  
Many dear to my heart over there,  
Are watching and waiting for me.”

Friends and neighbours, on the shores of the far country they look out on life’s ocean, and as they see our struggles, and hear the splash of our oars, they say, “Steer straight for me!” And when our boat’s keel glides up to the golden sand, they will be ready to lend a hand and give us a welcome grip.

## XII.

## STANDING CORN.

"Let us go forth into the field."—SOLOMON'S SONG, vii. 11.

Not long ago, and just before the time of harvest, it was my privilege and joy to see the corn-fields in their autumn glory. With that bright vision before me, God's blue sky above me, and the sweet sense of brooding calm upon me, I sat down on a stile that gave me a full view of all, and allowed my thoughts to wander at their own sweet will. There was a gentle breeze blowing—gentle, but enough to stir the golden sea of standing corn into gleaming, shimmering, billowy motion, and to make it rustle in a dreamy music which laid hold upon my fancy. The corn-field at once became to me a preacher. I want you to go with me in thought and spirit while I try to reproduce the lessons taught me in the rustling language of the standing corn.

I.—*Here are Revelations from God.* I feel myself to be in the presence of my Creator; and

all the questionings of doubt, and all the vain philosophies of the sceptic, vanish like the morning mist. My intellect, my conscience, my heart, my instinct if you will, prompts with remembrance of a present God. In this bright field of waving corn I see *His power*. What mighty forces are here at work! A few months ago this was a bare, brown, barren patch of soil. Incessant motion, rapid circulation, movements through every vein and fibre of these roots and stems, are swift as the lightning, quick as the sun-ray! I have been among the mighty machineries of men, and noted the noise and din of friction. Here the marvellous mechanics are wrought in sublimest silence, noiseless as the sun that floods the heavens with glory, or the stately march of the stars along the highways of the sky. I see *His wisdom*. What harmony in the whole operations, with never a collision, accident, or blunder! What exact adaptation of means to an end! All the elements of earth, and air, and sky, taxed and blended to produce this golden glory! What wonderful economy—the largest results from a most limited surface! See how the tall stems rise and stand close, “rank upon rank, in phalanx deep.” Each individual stem produces its own multiplied abundance, so closely packed each in its own chaff chamber, safe from harm! As I gaze upon



the populous plant with such a burden of wealth, safe carried, spite of wind and weather, on the yielding stem, I am led to say with Cowper, "There lives and works a soul in all things, and that soul is God." I see *His goodness*. Not only has its wise Contriver had in view its useful service, but He has clothed it with rare, refreshing beauty. The first green blush upon the soil, the long emerald ribbons flowing along the brown earth; the flashing gold of the ripened treasure—all beautiful, all gladdening, with a great delight. How strange, how good it is that this daily necessary, this perpetual staff of life, unlike occasional foods, should never sicken the tired eater nor pall upon the taste. God is good! I see *His faithfulness*. After the desolating flood, God declared that hence on for ever "summer and seedtime, autumn and harvest, should not cease." Since then thousands of years have passed, stars have fallen, mountains have been engulfed, nations have perished, mighty changes have been wrought, but this rich, ripe field of standing corn, in every waving stem, declares the steadfast faithfulness of God. As the breeze sweeps through the serried ranks of standing witnesses, I hear in the low rustling, "*O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all.*" As I look on this fair field, I see how,

II.—*Life comes out of Death.* Out of death and decay come life and beauty! Behold, I show you a mystery! A few months ago this bright field of teeming life was a graveyard, and every individual grain died, and was buried here, in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. In due time the trumpet of the spring winds announced the grand arising day, and here the dead-alive are standing arrayed in bright raiment, and clad in a glory that excelleth. The Athenians loudly laughed when Paul preached to them of the Resurrection, and the hollow laughter is echoed by the Sadducæan philosopher of modern days as he asks in sneers, “But *how* are the dead raised up?” Thou fool! that which *thou* sowest is not quickened except it die; and thou sowest not the body that shall be, but bare, naked grain, it may chance to be wheat or some other grain, but *God* giveth it a body as it pleaseth Him; and a beautiful body it is, as this field of golden corn bears witness! Standing here, the *mystery* of the resurrection, it is true, remains, but the impossibility dies out for ever! No, no, my friend. Christ *hath* brought immortality to light. The child “is *not* dead, but sleepeth.” “Martha, thy brother *shall* rise again.” The cemetery is the field of God. I hear the winds of heaven making music through the standing corn; and this is the

burden of their song, "*Sown in dishonour and raised in glory!*" As I sit and gaze on this field of wheat, I learn that

III.—*Like comes forth from Like.* This heavy crop of wheat is all the outcome of scattered *wheat*, and no other kind of plant could possibly arise. True, I can see here and there a few ears of bearded barley, and there a few more ears of rye; and here and there and yonder I see the bright red poppy, as if blushing to be in such wealthy company, or the yellow-coloured charlock, as if seeking to pass itself off for wheaten gold. But I know that every ear of barley sprung where a grain of barley chanced to fall; and for every crimson poppy flower a little round dark poppy-seed fell from the sower's hand,—for like for ever produces like. They who sow to the flesh must reap corruption, the harvest to which the fleshly always comes. They who sow to the Spirit shall reap the Spirit's immortality. Sow the wind, my reckless friend, and the seed shall grow and multiply until the whirlwind blows your hapless barns away! Surely if you bury the talent you will reap gnashing of teeth. "Ye did it not" shall reap "I know you not." Jacob sows a lie, and half breaks old Isaac's heart; he lives to reap the lie his sons forced on him, and bends his white head toward the grave.

Judas sows dishonesty as he carries the bag, and reaps the thirty pieces of silver for which he sold his soul. Paul sowed the loyalty which won him the crown which Royalty lifted to his brow. As the tall corn rustles beneath the light autumnal wind I hear it say, "*What a man soweth that shall he also reap.*" Here in the harvest field I learn, further,

IV.—*That Much comes from Little.* In a small compass of bag and basket was the seed-corn contained! What spacious yard, capacious barn, and extensive granary will be required to hold the vast result! Mark you, it would have been much the same had cockle, tares, or darnel been scattered on the soil. Little seeds bring great harvests, in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some a hundred-fold. Jeroboam makes two golden calves, and all the crowds of Israel sin thereby. There is something awful in this reproductive power of sin. Lucifer rebelled in heaven, and a third part of the angel host were damned by partaking in the awful crime! Pharaoh said "*No!*" to Moses. It was a little seed to sow, but it filled all Egypt with blood and tears. One crime, many crops. On the other hand, five consecrated loaves can feed five thousand hungry men. Five talents, well and wisely sown, bring ten populous cities subject

to the sower's rule. Peter sows one Gospel sermon, and a harvest of four thousand souls are garnered in the barns of God. The snowflakes make the avalanche, the acorn spreads the hills and vales with forests. As I look at the full field of grain, I hear in the rustling whisper of its multitudes, "*Despise not the day of small things.*" I read on this golden page of Nature's book,

V.—*That Fruit comes from Labour.* Success is the offspring of toil. Of the sluggard it is said that he shall beg in harvest and have nothing, but that the hand of the diligent maketh rich. The farmer shall "have something" out of this field, because he was no sluggard, but a diligent delver in the days of toil. This grand field, mind you, is no happy accident. It represents hard labour, long exposure, an aching body and weary limbs. Idleness and ease could never have brought things to this pass. This field of waving wheat is the farmer's fee for hard and willing work. You will find the truth hold good in your own daily labour, your handicraft, your profession, or your trade. You will find, too, that diligent effort will bring into your bosom rich sheaves of saving grace; that hard labour in the Church or the school, Christ's great field of toil, will bring harvests of spiritual success. Nothing is to be gained by listless indifference;

no sheaves ever force their way into folded hands. Up and doing, brothers mine! The field is wide and the time is short! A working Church is a reaping Church! Labour is wealth!

As I listen to the still, soft murmur of the bending corn, I hear—" *The labour of the righteous tendeth to life.*" " *Be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*" Still I find the glorious corn-field an open book, and read—

VI.—*That with Progress comes Maturity.* As you look at this field *now*, remember what it *was*. From the day the life-germs broke through their decaying shells, advancement has been the order of the day, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, then the ripe and mellow grain ready for the garner. Little by little, higher and greener, stronger and riper, ever maturing, ever progressing, until the stage of perfection is reached at last. It is so in the moral world. Constant progression in evil fits the sinner at last for the hopeless destiny of the oven and the fire. He who *walketh* in the counsel of the ungodly gets to *stand* in the way of sinners, and from thence advances to the *seat* of the ungodly, and from thence—God help me!—I can carry the desperate course no further. Growth

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in grace brings maturity of Christian character. Faith and hope and love grow stronger, brighter as the years go by. The life grows purer and more like the great Exemplar as the harvest-time draws near, until the "shock of corn" is garnered, being made meet for the paradise of God.

As I gaze on the ripe corn ready at last for reaping I hear the quiet voice of warning—  
"*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" I read—

VII.—*That Advantage comes from Trial.* As you look upon this sea of waving glory you remember that once it was as naked as the highway. Think of the bitter winds that swept it, the biting frosts, the drenching rains, the cutting ploughshare, the tearing harrow, the crushing roller, and all the severity of discipline required. Then came the hard fortunes of the tender plant, scorched and tossed, and battered by wind and sun, until it lay limp, flaccid, and yellow on the ungenial ground; and yet all these adverse seemings had a part in producing the golden glory that waves in triumph now. It is just so in the Lord's spiritual and human field; crosses, trials, reverses, and disappointments are all necessary preliminaries and preparatories to the joy of harvest. The ripening process is carried on

through all kinds of weather, and January's frosts, and March winds, and April's tears, and July suns are all included in the "all things that work together" for the good of the August harvest. The rustling motion of the mellow grain crop says, quite plainly, "*All things work together for good to them that love God.*" I learn—

VIII.—*That Destiny comes from Character.*  
By-and-by the reapers will put in the sickle. What for? In order that the prostrate crop may be trodden under foot, or bundled for the fire? No, no. It is *wheat*, precious and good, therefore its destiny is the barn, and even the gleanings shall be gathered and housed with care. The weeds, the thistles, these are noxious, and must feel the fire. Their character is bad, and that decides their destiny. O men and women! your character shall decide yours. Are you morally worthy or worthless? Good, to be gathered into vessels, or bad, to be cast away? What are you in the sight of God? The wind-swept corn gives forth a solemn monody to me now; hark—"*Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*" Again, I read on this bright page of Nature's book—



IX.—*That Fruition comes from Faith.* Many months ago, the farmer set to work here, but he could exercise but small control; for aught he knew the land might have lost its fertility, or the seed might have lost its germinating power. Perhaps the sun might forbear to shine, or the rain to fall. There might be no return for all his anxious care. But he had faith: faith in the soil, faith in the seed, faith in the sun, faith in the sure processes that he could neither control nor understand. He had *faith* and patience, too, and all this sterling gold is his reward. Learn the lesson: God's promise cannot fail. No good deed is lost. Incorruptible seed cannot die. The cup of cold water shall brim over into an expanding stream which shall water my own garden and the fields of God. Hark ye to what the rustling corn-field sings—“*He that goeth forth weeping and bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*” Still another lesson waits my learning—

X.—*That the Seen comes from the Unseen.* The buried corn was hidden. What was going on beneath the surface was hidden from human ear and eye. What is going on? You do not know. What kind of seed is it? You cannot tell. How much will there be from it? You

cannot possibly predict. It is all secret, hidden—as secret, my friend, as the thoughts of your heart, as the secret sins of your life, as the germ or bias of evil in your nature. It is as secret, Christian, as the depth of your loyalty and love, the private deeds of godly sacrifice, brave endurance, pious beneficence, closet prayers. But wait awhile; the secret of the soil is revealed; the day hath declared it: and this fair field is the answer for all the world to read. Do you hear again the solemn wind-whisper among the standing corn—“*There is nothing hidden that shall not be known.*” Time is gone, but I would fain read for the young—

XI.—*That Gain comes from Opportunity.* If the farmer had let the ploughing season pass, if he had permitted the sowing season to slip by, no such glorious sight as this golden treasure would have gladdened his eye. No; he caught the season while it lasted, he seized the opportunity while he had it. Last winter was the parent of this success; last spring was the foster-mother of this field of corn. He turned to use the precious *present*; he put out to usury the golden now; and this is the usury that has come of it, this golden guerdon, this wealth of grain. Don't you hear every bended head, as the bright field shimmers in the wind, saying—“*What thine*

*hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, for there is no knowledge nor device in the grave whither thou goest."* One last lesson read I in golden letters—

XII.—*That All comes from God.* That's the crowning lesson. His the soil, the seed, the sower, the sun, the success. All are the absolute gift of His gracious providence and tender love. He crowns the year with His goodness, and above and over all He gives His best and dearest, gives to us poor pensioners, to us poor sinners, His Son, a Saviour! Himself, a Father! His Spirit, a Comforter! His Heaven, a Home! Blow, sweet breeze, from heaven. Shine down, O beaming sun. Wave and bend, O golden corn, and *bid ME* sing the song of praise—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."

As I leave the stile, the farmer meets me. "The corn is quite ripe," said I. "Yes," said he, "harvest begins to-morrow." *To-morrow!* Oh, to be ripe and ready when the reaper and the sickle comes!

## XIII.

*A SOUND FROM HEAVEN.**For Whitsunday.*

"The day of Pentecost was fully come."—ACTS ii. 1-4.

THE early Christians used to make this a solemn feast day to celebrate the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost; and it was their custom on this occasion to wear white garments, especially those of them who were about to be admitted to church privileges—as emblems of the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit upon heart and life. The holiday still continues both in observance and name, but the pious dress has fallen into disuse. It is within our power, thanks to the coming of the Good Spirit, to enjoy and celebrate a Whitsuntide all round the year, by wearing always the garments of holiness and the white flower of a blameless life. Nevertheless, it is well and fitting that on Whit-Sunday morning, our thoughts should be directed to that holy time when, on the waiting Church, the spirit of

life, and light, and power was poured out, and the Comforter, promised by the ascending Lord, came down to take abiding place in the hearts of His people and the assemblies of His saints.

“Come ! Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,  
With all Thy quick’ning powers ;  
Come, shed abroad the Saviour’s love,  
And that shall kindle ours.”

I. *When it happened.* Fifty days after the *Passover*, when the Lamb of God, our Paschal Lamb, was offered, and salvation was won for us from the bondage of sin and the captivity of the devil. It was the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the harvest thanksgiving, when the loaves of leavened bread, the first-fruits of the ingathering, were solemnly waved before the Lord. It was the self-same time, too, when, fifty days after they had crossed the Red Sea into liberty, the Israelites received the law upon Mount Sinai. Don’t you think this is all exceedingly suggestive? The day was also the first harvest for Christ, when 3000 souls, saved and pardoned, were waved before the Lord,—an earnest of the harvest of souls in process from then till now. Surely the Pentecostal loaves did well represent that influence of the descending Spirit which is the food, the staff of life, to all believing souls ; and it was fit and good that the anniversary of the giving of the law should be the very time

when He, the Holy Ghost, should come who writes the law within us, and engraves its holy principles in our inmost parts. The harvest speaks of *labour*, the wave-loaves speak of *life*, Sinai's wonder speaks of *law*, these three; and to-day the law of holiness is kept, and the labour of love is done, and the life of Christ is given by the Holy Ghost. Hail, holy Whitsuntide! And Thou, O Blessed Spirit, come! Give us this *Life*! Teach us this *Law*! Help us to love this *Labour*! that, by-and-by, we may celebrate a heavenly Whitsuntide, clad in saintly garments, clean and white, a feast that shall know no breaking up.

II. *Where it took place.* In the city of Jerusalem. The place of the Saviour's death was the place where His followers received their new life. The place of His weakness became the place of His power; the place of His shame became the scene of His glory. It was in an upper room that the Holy Pentecost transpired. Only the larger houses had this second story, and it was usually set apart as a guest-chamber, having an opening to the roof, where the guests could sit in the soft and balmy twilight in social converse. We know that there were but very few of our Lord's disciples who were well enough to do to command a house like this. Joseph, the Arima-

thean, and probably Nicodemus, a member of the council, could. Whichever of them it was, they made the little company welcome. The richer, you see, gave facilities to the poorer, which is as it should be, though it is not enough the practice, even in the Christian Church. There is every probability that this Pentecostal chamber is the self-same upper room in which Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples. If so, what a contrast, as an old writer says, between that last supper and this thanksgiving feast. Then the little band were sad enough. All was fears and tears, and the shadow of the cross fell cold and chill upon them—now, in the same room, the same guests are bright with a jubilant gladness, and a luminous glory rested on them like the shadow of the Throne! This Pentecostal power and glory, you see, did not come to Herod's gorgeous palace, or to Pilate's stately hall, or to the high priest's lofty mansion, nor even to the crest of Olivet, or to the Temple's splendid dome. The power and glory descended to a private house, as if to show that every home may have a Pentecost, and every hearth be gladdened by this Guest Divine!

III.—*To whom did it come?* Not simply to Peter and James and John. These favoured three had been especially chosen for high privilege

during the Saviour's life. They alone were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the death chamber where the ruler's daughter lay asleep, and in the shadows of Gethsemane. But they gain no special favour here. Not even to the band of chosen apostles only was it given to see this great sight, far grander vision than Moses had, who saw the burning bush. The whole Church was in the sacred circle of privilege that day. About one hundred and twenty, it is said, were present. We are only acquainted with a few of them. All the apostles we know, of course. Doubtless they were all there, but I don't think that they were ranged in order by themselves. This is a family gathering, and they all are equal here. There is the white-haired Mary there, the mother of our Lord. The sword had pierced her own soul through and through, but the wound will be healed to-day for evermore. There sits also that sweet and tender soul, Mary Magdalen, with soul brimful of love, and her eyes glistening with tears as when Rabboni met her in the garden. I think the poor woman who touched the hem of His garment is there, but the soft pallor on her face is due to quite another cause to-day. I am quite sure that Salome, and the other loving women that ministered to Jesus of their substance, are there. You see, it is their turn to be ministered unto now, and Jesus, in wonderful



fashion, is about to pay His debt. I see Joseph and Nicodemus, and one or two others who are well to-do, but the bulk of the party are the poor. I picture to myself a few young folks in the group. Surely there is that twelve-year-old lassie to whom the Lord said "Talitha cumi" a few months before. I am glad to read, too, that the "brethren of Jesus" were there. In His life-time they had held aloof from Him, had said many hard things of Him; but they have come round at last—a lesson to all of us whose relations are among the unbelievers. Hope on and pray. Look in upon the whole assembled group, young and old, rich and poor, there they sit waiting, waiting, waiting for their Lord.

IV.—*How it came.* Christ had told them to stop in Jerusalem to wait and hope, to pray and expect the coming of power from on high. "Not many days hence," He had said. So here they are, obedient to His word. Look at them, I pray you. They are in the *true* attitude for receiving. Christ hath promised equally great things for you and me. WAIT, STRIVE, PRAY. Though it tarry, wait for it, ay, more than they that watch for the morning. I want you to notice too, that they were not only in one place, at one time, but it was "with one accord." When Queen Mary died, soon after Calais was lost to the English crown, she said that after death they would find

"*Calais*" written on her heart. On every heart in that assembly was written, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

The city was full of visitors who had come to the Jewish feast of Pentecost; and outside the house they could hear the tramp of feet, the sound of mirth, the din of city life. But the doors were shut, and all that was shut out: not only shut but locked, bolted fast. You must not forget that they meet in peril. They who crucified their Lord are still exceeding mad against His followers, and still they meet in secret for fear of the Jews. So the time passes, occasionally good words are said, earnest prayers are offered, quiet talk is interchanged. All this grows less and less, voices become whispers, whispers become signs, signs are stilled into quiet. A great hush ensues—each one sits motionless, but the words written on the heart throb and pulsate—all is still! A rush—a sweeping sound, a solemn booming noise succeeds—heads droop, hands clasp, eyes close. Not a door shakes, not a garment stirs, only that rolling surging swell. Suddenly a large, bright glory-blaze, the luminous Shekinah cloud, lustrous, lambent, dazzling, hovers overhead. It divides itself into little living tongue-shaped flames and distributes itself over each, resting on every forehead, like a star, haloing it with glory,

crowning it with fire! The place was filled, each soul was filled—filled brimful of the Spirit of Power from on high! The silence is broken, the hush is ended. The power of tongues, the preaching power, the confessing power, the evangelising power, rings out from every voice, and will never, never more be silenced so long as the earth goes revolving round the sun! No fear of the Jews now, no cautious whispers because of listening ears now. “They all began to speak.” It was a holy noise! And across that threshold and through that open door Peter and his comrades rush into the crowd, and cry—“Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made the same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ!”

V. *What were its Results?* They were filled with love to Jesus—they were purged and separated from their sins—their faith was established, and defied all the after-floods of persecution, and outrage, and prison, and death. They were endowed with power to be good, and to do good, and to spread the Gospel far and wide. They were united by that tie of a common life-flame, into one family. A holy enthusiasm laid hold upon them. Before their loosened tongues sinful crowds are bending like autumn corn before the breeze of heaven. The tongues of

flame ran through all Judea, and through all the Roman empire. They are flaming yet! The fire spreads! The light of life to-day shines in growing lustre among every people, and nation, and tongue; and, in God's own time, in spite of men and devils, the inextinguishable blaze shall crown every hill-top, shine through every valley and illumine every plain and wrap the world in its transforming and celestial blaze!

Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, shall we not have this baptism, this Pentecostal fire? We may, for the Spirit is poured out without measure. We may, for the promise was to them and to their children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call!

Will you remember that the tongues of fire sat on *each* of them, not on holy men only, not on the beloved John alone—on every ONE of them, the youngest and the least! Oh, I do beseech you, let us get into the Pentecostal attitude. Waiting! praying! expecting with one accord! Come, Holy Ghost! Blow, matchless Wind, with mighty sound, across thy waiting Church! Burn, glorious Flame, in every waiting soul! Inspire, O Tongue, our every word and loose our stammering tongues to tell the wonders of Immanuel!

## XIV.

*TOUCHING THE SCEPTRE.*

“What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee.”—  
ESTHER v. 6.

WE have here the mention of a great king—a king over kings, a king who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, a kingdom which stretched all the way from India on the one hand to the coasts of Africa on the other, a king having a great kingdom and a great name—Ahasuerus, monarch of the Medes and Persians. Of course, such a monarch had a stately palace and an imposing throne. The palace of Shushan, in which his majesty dwelt, was a marvel of splendour and a wonder of wealth; and in this palace was reared his throne, high and lifted up, and constructed of ivory and alabaster, and gold and silver, and ornamented in dazzling fashion with various kinds of gems and precious stones. A grand throne, I warrant you, for the great and mighty king that sat on it; a throne which, if anybody dared to approach

it, they did at the peril of their life. If the king held out his sceptre, there was a chance for them; if not, the executioner was within call, and lopping a man's head from his shoulders was a small matter, I can tell you, especially if the king had nodded his head before the sword-stroke fell. Now, can you see him?—the high and mighty monarch, King Ahasuerus, with crown upon his head, sceptre in his hand, royal robes of costly magnificence on his broad shoulders, seated on his high and lofty throne. On this side and on that side are ranged his princes—princes of the blood, it may be, and princes of the state; behind these, lesser chiefs, lower dignitaries, officers, soldiery, servants, and, a little behind, a brawny-looking man, with muscular, thick-set limbs, standing with stern and lowering look on his bearded face, and having a huge sword leaning on his shoulder. That's the chief executioner, and constant practice and his great strength enable him to strike through a neck at a blow.

Now I want to introduce you to the queen. That sounds a very grand name, and calls up the idea of great honour and majesty, and royal robes, and attendant ladies, and I know not what, not being very well versed in that kind of study. But an Eastern queen, in those old times, and at the court of those Oriental despots,

did not find her place a bed of roses. The woman, always regarded as much inferior to the man, was, of course, a long, long way below a king. In this case the last queen had been deposed, stripped of her royalty, and expelled from the palace, because she refused to show herself before the king and his nobles when they were all engaged in a drunken revel. Her successor, the queen I want to introduce to you, is very young, very beautiful, and, just at this time, very sad and sorrowful at heart.

You see, the real fact is that she is a Jewess, but the king does not know it. Her old uncle, Mordecai, who has had her in his care since she was a child, advised her, if the king chose her for her beauty from the rest of the maidens, to keep her race a secret. I think that was wrong, and so the wrong, as usual, brings tears to the eyes and sorrow to the heart. You and I will do well to give it a wide berth, and do right, that we may have no thorns in our pillow and few unpleasant dreams.

Now, just at this time, there was a great excitement against the Jews, as there is in Russia and other places at this day. It had been fermented and "brought to a head," as we say, by a nobleman high in the king's favour, who had a bitter grudge against old Mordecai, the queen's uncle—though he did not know he was her uncle or

he might have thought twice before he did that which ultimately broke his neck for him. At last a decree went forth from the king that the Jews in his kingdom should be killed, one and all ! As soon as Uncle Mordecai hears the proclamation, off he goes to his niece, Queen Esther, in a dreadful state of anxiety and fear, and tells her all about it, and begs of her to make her way into the presence of the king, and plead for the lives of all her people.

“But,” said Esther the queen, “I dare not do that. You know the law : If either man or woman venture before the king without being sent for, they will lose their head, unless, indeed, the king should stretch his sceptre out for them to touch, and tell them to draw near. It is hardly likely he will do that with me, for I think I am in disgrace already, for he has not even asked for me or after me for thirty days or more. And, even if he did give me audience, as soon as he finds out that I am a Jewess, I am a dead woman.”

But the old man pressed her hard. He told her that the lives of all the Jews were in her hands, and that, if she did not go, she would surely be murdered with the rest, although she dwelt in the palace and was called a queen. So at last she consented. “Well,” said she, “I will go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish.”



Away goes Mordecai, and gets all the Jews who lived in the neighbourhood to fast and pray, and plead with Almighty God that the queen might be successful, might be welcomed by the king, might obtain her request.

Now let us look at the queen. She is in her own chamber; her eyes are red with tears, and her young heart palpitates with fear at the thought of facing the terrible king unbidden, and of standing before that dazzling ivory throne. She put on her royal apparel, robed herself as a queen should, knelt down, we may depend upon it, and poured out her soul in prayer to that greater King, who sits on a grander throne than that of her lord and master; and then timidly, tremblingly, made her way, with bended head and beating heart, toward the awful door of the throne-room, in which his majesty was seated, discussing with his counsellors some affairs of state. I think her maids of honour warned her not to go; I think the court chamberlains went down upon their knees to beseech her majesty not to be so bold and daring; but she had made up her mind. "I'll do my best," said the queen to herself, "to save my people. If I perish, I perish; but I'll offer my prayer, even if the sword strikes me down on the steps of the throne."

See! her hand is on the door, the heavy curtains tremble as she draws them aside, and

with pale cheeks, white lips, she stands within the chamber, with her hands folded on her breast and her head bowed, waiting to see whether the sceptre would be held out, waiting to hear the word that meant life or death to her, just as the king might choose. There is, for a moment, a dead silence. Esther could hear the throb of her heart beneath her bodice. Then a kindly light shines on the monarch's face; the golden sceptre, jewelled with gems of priceless worth, is held out to the brave and beautiful queen; she steps forward, with answering jewels in her eyes, in the shape of tears, casts herself upon her knees, touches the sceptre with her finger; and the king says, "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee, even to the half of my kingdom."

I need not tell you of all that followed—how Esther succeeded in her prayer, and saved the lives of all her people; how her uncle, Mordecai, was promoted to high honour; how the revengeful noble had to swing on his own gallows, and how Queen Esther's memory is held in reverence by the Jews to this day. What I want you to think about and to ponder over a little is this beautiful and affecting picture of Queen Esther in the presence of the king. It was a noble deed, nobly done by a noble woman, and in this in-

stance, at any rate, Ahasuerus acted like a noble king.

But the while I read the thrilling story I am thinking of another King—that King of kings who is the wise and only potentate, the Majesty of Heaven, whose rule is not simply over one hundred and twenty provinces, but whose kingdom ruleth over all, and whose throne, when Isaiah saw it, was high and lifted up, with the seraphim around it, standing in its glory. I am thinking of another Royal decree—not the capricious law for the killing of a people, but the eternally just and righteous decree—the death of sinners and the punishment of sin. I am thinking of my sins and yours, of my condemnation and yours, of my absolute dependence on the royal mercy and yours, of my manifold, great, and constant needs and yours; and I am asking, How shall we come and appear before God? How may we hope to avert His wrath, to escape the sword of the avenger, to gain pardoning mercy and kingly favour, to obtain Royal bounty, gifts, and blessings, and win the good our soul, our life, so greatly and desperately needs.

It is an object of ambition and absorbing desire on the part of some to get near the throne of royalty—that of Queen Victoria or others—and they are welcome, for me, to whatever

good it can bring them ; but, as a poor sinner, as a forlorn and needy soul, bankrupt of resources, and with no hope, either for the present or the future, but in the Great God that sits upon the highest throne of all, I want to go to Him. I want to gain an audience of Him. I want to fall at His feet ; I want to touch His sceptre ; I want to present my poor petitions at His footstool. If I cannot, I must sin ; if I cannot, I must sorrow ; if I cannot, I must weep ; if I cannot, I must die ! But “the Lord’s throne is in the heaven.” How may I reach it ? “Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne.” How can I venture to it ? It is the “throne of His holiness.” How can I stand before it ? “Out of it proceedeth lightnings, and thunders, and voices.” How can I approach it ?

Hark ye ! Come boldly to the throne of grace. It is the throne of power, it is the throne of judgment ; but it has been sprinkled with the blood of atonement, the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and so it has been transformed into a mercy-seat, it has become a throne of grace. If Esther, Persia’s noble queen, succeeded in her petition, how much more are we certain of a welcome, sure of a hearing, secure of an answer to our prayers ! She came into the presence of a despot, a proud imperious tyrant, who ruled or misruled according to the

passions of the hour. We are come to the God of love and grace. Though He is the Lord Jehovah, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, He reveals Himself as "your Heavenly Father," and you are distinctly warranted by Jesus when you come to say, "Our Father." She was, by a stern, exclusive law, forbidden to enter the presence of the king, and such as dared to venture were liable to the penalty of death. No invitation encouraged her, no promise gave her hope; but, instead, silence repelled her and threatenings debarred her. But you are invited—nay, besought, exhorted, entreated to draw near. Promises, many and bright as stars in the sky, are ever falling on your ears to attract you and induce you to come. The Royal sceptre is always stretched, always waiting your timorous or confident touch; and always above the sceptre is the winsome and welcoming smile of the King. Esther had an enemy at the king's right hand, a cruel, subtle, and powerful opposer and foe. She had no friend to introduce her, no influential voice to intercede for her; she had to venture into the proud and perilous presence alone. You have a Friend at court, even the beloved Son of the King, no other one than the Prince Immanuel Himself, who loves you, counts you dear as His own soul, and whose intercessions are ever bound to prevail.

“The Father hears Him pray,  
His dear Anointed One ;  
He cannot turn away  
The presence of His Son.”

The king's favourite was Esther's enemy ; but the Great King's favourite is your best, your all-powerful Friend. Esther had no example to cheer her ; none had dared ever to make the venture. She had to walk an untrodden path ; she had to dare a singular and unexampled deed. You have the sure guarantee of millions of seeking souls who have come to this throne of grace unscathed, and gloriously successful in their petitions, and you cannot light upon one that was ever punished for coming, or that was ever sent empty away. Oh, poor sinner ! do you hear my voice ? The throne of grace is open, the sceptre of mercy is stretched forth to you.

“Pardon and peace ye all may find,  
For God hath bidden all mankind !”

Christian ! you know that you are welcome at the footstool of the King ; but do you avail yourself of the glorious privilege ? What the king said to trembling Esther, your King and God and Father says to you : “What is thy request ?” Don't be afraid. What ! More grace ? more light ? more holiness ? more peace ? more faith ? Or has it to do with the body or estate ?

Food, raiment, shelter, help, comfort, guidance ?  
Or with thy household, or with the Church ?  
Hark ye what the King says. See what is  
carven on the throne, engraven on the sceptre.  
Read, I pray thee : " Whosoever will come may  
come." " Whatsoever good thing ye may de-  
sire." Let us, then, come boldly to the throne  
of grace, and find mercy and grace to help in  
time of need. " Half his kingdom " was the  
boastful promise to successful Esther. It is  
your Father's good pleasure to give you " the  
kingdom." All the kingdom of Providence, all  
the kingdom of grace, all the kingdom of glory,  
are yours by right, for ye are Christ's, and Christ  
is God's, and God, your Father, is All in All.

## XV.

*A SEARCH FOR HONEY.**For Young Men.*

"Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee."  
—PROV. xxv. 16.

THERE is a very mistaken notion abroad among young folks that religion is a melancholy business, that it is the enemy of pleasure, the stern opponent of all that is delightful, and that it puts a strict embargo upon all that goes to make life enjoyable. Its demands are so hard, its restraints so many and so binding, and its general influence so depressing, that nature, especially in the young, rebels against it, and regards its demands as a burden too grievous to be borne. Christianity is supposed to be synonymous with inanity, and to impose a weariness alike on flesh and spirit that stifles the freedom, represses the elasticity, and dulls the brightness which are the natural and precious heritage of youth. In other words, "honey" is supposed to be forbidden—to be laid under interdict, because it is



sweet; and, on the principle that all salutary and medicinal things are bitter, religion prescribes only an alternative diet of wormwood and aloes, and other astringents of an equally unpalatable kind.

It is a lie, as false as the devil, the father of lies, who coined it. His first attack on religious obedience, which, you must remember, was vitally linked to perfect enjoyment, was a lie whispered to the pure and pleasant pair in Paradise, and, from that day to this, that parent lie, the prolific mother of all the subsequent slanders against true religion, has been the deadly delusion by which the Evil One has blinded the eyes, and darkened the minds, and deceived the souls of men. I stand here in the house of God as the messenger of God, with my finger on the holy pages of God, as the champion of pleasure, the advocate of hilarity, the apostle of enjoyment, the prophet of light-heartedness. I look in the face every young man who looks on me, and I say, "Hast thou found honey? Eat it," and may the taste be sweet to thy palate—"down-right enjoyable," as we use to say—grateful to thy spirit, and pleasant to thy memory long after the feast has passed away.

I hold that pleasure is a necessity of our nature; that we are made to enjoy, and that the goodness of God, which hath made our complex

constitution, our many-sided manhood so marvellously capable of pleasure, hath made bountiful provision for full satisfaction and delight. This body, which His wisdom hath so fearfully and wonderfully made, He hath endowed with senses capable of exquisite sensations of delight. My ear is ravished with the sound of music; my nostrils are regaled almost to intoxication with the delicate fragrance of sweet smells; my palate is instinct with grateful appreciation of all pleasant fruits and savoury food; my eye—that most astounding miracle of delicate complexity, which in itself makes infidelity impossible for rational minds to swallow—can focus half heaven's blue, a thousand stars, or a whole landscape of summer beauty at once, and gives me feelings of rapturous enjoyment all too deep for words. Now, to begin with, let common sense give the devil the lie when I ask which of these glorious powers of sense, which of these joy-giving sensations, is dulled, dimmed, or deadened, because I am a Christian and follow religion as the chief good? Has the harp less music, or the rose less fragrance, or the grape less sweetness, or the skies less splendour to me, because I am a child of God? Some of you profess to have a great contempt for cant. But there is a cant of irreligion quite as detestable; and when you talk of the melancholy of religion, *you* become

the Pharisaic boaster, and not I. You thank your god, whoever or whatever that may be, that you are not like other men—certainly not like any pious publican. To which the Christian can respond, "All the gateways of my five senses are as open as yours ; the gates open as glibly to let in the pleasure, and can be shut as closely to keep out the pain ; and, through all God's wide creation, all that the skill of the Creator or the wit of man can devise for pure enjoyment is as accessible to me as you, and is productive of at least an equal joy." So some quaint old writer sings—

"Five senses have I, each one keen and clear,  
And I can feel and see, smell, taste, and hear ;  
No bounds God's bounty hath, and every sense  
Discerns all good, with joy the more intense  
That, given for pleasure and for happy use,  
He saves me from the pains of its abuse."

In all true physical delights, then, the Christian finds honey, and to him the good God says, "Hast thou found honey ? Eat it." And depend upon it that with him "good digestion waits on appetite," as with any unbeliever of you all.

But man's physical being is only a portion of his noble and superior constitution. What about his intellectual manhood ? Has the non-religious any advantage over the Christian there ? If the intellect seeks pleasure in the study of the physical

universe, does the Christian philosopher bungle in the search, and discover less to charm his mind than do his scientific comrades of less assured belief? Were Isaac Newton's wings clipped by his religion, when he soared into the very region of the sun, and plucked from out the highest firmament the profoundest secret of the stars? Was Brewster's keen, capacious mind dulled by his Christianity, when he revelled in the brilliant glories of optical discovery and the realms of light? Was Faraday's conspicuous piety a cloud upon his brain or a fetter on his hand when he revealed to us the astounding mysteries of electricity, which, according to my thinking, is going rapidly to forward the transformation of the world? In any other field of intellectual delight the challenge holds equally good. Does the unbeliever sing a nobler epic than Milton, or a sweeter song than Spenser, Cowper, or Old Ken? Or, to come down to our meaner level, are the beauties of Shakespeare, the sublimities of Burke, or the philosophy of Bacon, or the humour of Hood, or the pages of any of the sons of genius, less precious and pleasant to the Christian than to you? "Let us clear our mind of cant," as Dr. Johnson said, and recognise the fact, honestly and broadly, that as with the physical, so with the intellectual, the Christian's capability runs on all fours with that of the unbeliever in

the direction of any mental honey of pleasure and delight that can be found; and the royalty of mind is at least as kingly and imperial when it bends before the crowned Christ as when Reason binds the lordly symbol around its own presumptuous brow.

But ours is a triple manhood. There is not only the physical man, the intellectual man, but there is the moral and spiritual man, whose existence cannot be absolutely ignored. You may be venturesome enough to doubt the immortality of the soul, but you cannot doubt the felt existence of right and wrong, nor dispute that the one has pleasures and the other has penalties that cannot be evaded. Nobody will dispute that there is honey in doing right, that there is pleasure in goodness and truth, and that, unless the conscience is utterly dead, and the man has no more moral sensation than swine at a trough, there is a bitterness in doing wrong. Coleridge calls the conscience "the pulse of reason," and there can be but little of the honey of real pleasure if the pulse is either fever-rapid or deathly still. And Lord Byron, who cannot be said to have had much religion, says—

"Yet still there whispers a small voice within,  
Heard in the silence—heard, too, in the din;  
Whatever creed be taught, or land be trod,  
Man's conscience is the oracle of God."

Well, now, as to the honey of life to be found in a good conscience, in doing right, in walking uprightly, according to the universally recognised laws of morality. Is there any reason why the Christian should not at any rate be your equal in all that goes to make a manly character? I suppose that the most arrant scoffer would not deny that there have been, and are, Christian men and women who are quite as pure, quite as moral, quite as good as any who condemn religion and reject the Christ. That is proof enough that they need not be more melancholy because they have a conscience, that they need not find less of moral honey in goodness because they are religious. No, no; face the fact! As in the physical man, as in the mental man, so in the moral man, there is nothing in religion that can deprive us of all the real enjoyment, the true pleasure, the satisfying honey, the rational delights, which are possible to anybody in all God's wide world. The idea of attaching melancholy to religion is a monstrous figment, and the lie has been a million times exploded, to be again a million times concocted to scare away the sinner from the cross of Christ.

But now, dear friends, that I have showed you that my chances, opportunities, and possibilities, as a Christian, of finding honey, obtaining pleasure, and chasing melancholy, are quite on a level with yours, however non-religious you

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may be, I am inclined to take other and higher ground, and ask you the question, "Hast thou found honey?" This gloomy, melancholy, sunless experience which you put down to religion, have you a freedom from it? Do you experience unfeigned enjoyment? Do you realise pleasure? Do you enjoy life? Have you a satisfaction that I have not? Have you found honey? Of course, I mean now a honey other and beyond that of which I have spoken in nature, mind, and morals, because, as we have seen, that is as much mine as yours. The bees that fill those lives are working for me as much as for you, and my senses, my mind, and my conscience are quite as well off and possess quite as good a fortune as yours.

I want to see if you are any better off than I. My friend—my young friend—you who refuse to seek pleasure and to search for sweet treasure in the same fields as I—what success have you had? Hast thou found honey? Have you found it in your recreations, your amusements, your freer methods of hunting pleasure? Ha! there, you say, we have him on the hip. Religion frowns on recreations, puts a ban on amusements, has a puritanical antipathy to good fellowship. Stop thy impeachment, friend; for, lo! I deny it altogether. Let me tell you what my religion allows, I was going to say *enjoins*, in the way of pleasant recreations. First, *they must do me*

*no harm.* They must not dull the sensibility of those wondrous five senses God has given me; they must not undermine my health or dishonour the noble temple of my body. They must not rob my brain of its vital energy, its clear thinking power, its quick adaptability, its equable balance. They must not disturb my conscience and insult the knowledge of RIGHT that is within me. Second, *they must recreate my body*, brace it up, and leave me readier for after-service. The pleasure that results in weariness, faggedness, lassitude, is not pleasure—you will find precious little honey in that. Thirdly, *they must refresh my mind*: not make it sluggish, heavy, depressed, and ill at ease. The so-called pleasures that stupefy, irritate, make languid, and superinduce “the blues,” as you call them, on the morrow, these are ghastly parodies on pleasure, and produce as much honey as you can gather from a whinbush in November. Fourthly, *they must cheer my heart*. In their present influence, in their results, and in their memory; they shall neither vex me with regrets, sadden me with reproach, nor sting me with remorse. Within these wide bounds, I will sing “Begone, dull care!” with the best of you; and on Solomon’s principle, that “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine,” I’ll be thankful for all the honey we can find.



Do I speak to any person whose search for pleasure goes beyond that—who never seeks anything else but pleasure!—who seeks pleasure in immoral enjoyments and sheer sensual delights? I say, hast thou found honey? Nay, verily; or, if thou hast, thou hast been stung in deadly fashion in the gathering of it, and God help thee; thou shalt drink bitterly of the wormwood and the gall! Young men! the pleasures of sin are not honey. They may be sweet to the taste. Half the deadliest drugs on the apothecaries' shelves are sweet; stolen waters are sweet; bread eaten in secret is pleasant; but know thou that death is there, and the steps that lead thee thither take hold on hell? Brothers, it is sin! sin! not religion that maketh melancholy. It is sin! sin! not Christianity that saddens the life, blasts the future, breaks the heart, and makes the soul weep tears of blood. The world, the foolish, the purblind, call sin pleasure; and the word elicits the loudest laugh of hell! Men and women saunter down into the gay gardens of sensual delights and pluck what they call the flowers of pleasure; and unknowingly gather hemlock and heubane, and nightshade and hellebore, and all the herbs that make up the pharmacopœia of the damned! "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." There is no honey in sin; though it is sweet to the tongue, its nature is

wormwood, and in the belly it is bitter as gall ! I have read of a certain Greek artist, who made a model of a serpent, and fixed it in the bottom of a costly cup ; coiled for the spring, a pair of gleaming eyes in its head, and in its open mouth fangs raised to strike, it lay beneath the ruby wine. Nor did he who raised the golden goblet to quench his thirst and quaff the delicious draught suspect what lay below, till, as he reached the dregs, that dreadful head rose up and glistened before his eyes ! So when life's cup is nearly emptied, sin's last pleasure quaffed, and the bitter dregs are drained, shall rise the undying worm—to bite like a serpent, and, like an adder, sting the soul !

“Hast thou found honey !” Come with me, and let us ask the question as we go. Here's Cain wandering to and fro with the blotch of blood upon his hand. “Hast thou found honey ?” “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” Here's Achan, gloating over the wedge of gold and the Babylonish robe ! “Hast thou found honey ?” The stones of judgment crush him into silence, and there is no reply. Here comes Amasa, captain of Absalom's rebel host, and who so proud a youth as he ? “Hast thou found honey ?” “Yes,” he proudly cries ; and lo ! he welters in his blood, with Joab's dagger in his breast. Here follows the gay and beautiful

Prince Absalom on proud and prancing steed. "Hast thou found honey?" "Yes; I've won my father's crown!" See where he swings in the oak-branch by his hair, and a spear-thrust at his heart. Here's Gehazi, returning home with changes of raiment and bags of gold. "Hast thou found honey?" "Sweet honey," quoth he, as he jingles the coin; but, lo! the cup is at its dregs, and he crawls away a leper ghastly white. Cometh Haman, the cunning plotter for honours and rank. "Hast thou found honey?" "Yes; I am prime minister, and Mordecai dies;" and lo! he hangs in the gallows meant for the Jew. Here's Herod, whose pleasure is mad ambition. "Hast thou found honey?" "Yes; they say I'm a god, and not a man!" And in his costly apparel the worms destroy him, his robe is his winding-sheet; the serpent has sprung, and the dregs are drained. Here comes Solomon. He has searched for pleasure in kingly fashions; surely honey hath fallen like manna of old. He is old and grey-headed, and sighs as he walks. "Hast thou found honey?" "Vanity, vanity! vexation and vanity!" he cries, and the darkness swallows him from view! But perhaps you prefer more modern witness? Ask Voltaire, the petted and brilliant genius, the favourite of kings, the darling of the people. "Hast thou found honey?" "I shall go to hell and my

physician with me." Ask Lord Byron, prince of pleasure-seekers, Laureate of sensuality. "Hast thou found honey?" "Shall I sue for mercy? Come, come, no weakness!" Ask Rothschild, the millionaire. "I'm very poor!" I cannot continue the sad record. Enough to show that pleasure, whether of gold, sensuality, or pride, has no honey, but the wages of sin is the very bitterness of death!

"Pleasure may be sweet, but how swiftly pleasure flies!  
And bitter is the ending when the pleasure-seeker dies."

Young men! I know where honey, true honey, the sweets of real delight, lie hidden in rich profusion. In this Book! Hark you: "How sweet are Thy words to my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" David had found honey! "If My people had hearkened to My word and walked in My way, I would have fed them with honey out of the Rock." They rejected the honey. What say you? Will you accept it, or will you reject it? Hark again: "Thy word have I hid in my heart!" Then what? "How sweet are Thy thoughts unto me!" You see the honey in this case is an indwelling possession. Its sources are in the Godhead, and its enjoyments are in the soul. This honey is the felt presence and favour of our God. Solon, the Greek sage, said, "No man ought to be called

happy till he dies." If so, where's the honey? But David, the Jewish sage, under a higher inspiration, says, "Happy is the man whose God is the Lord." But how can this be? By way of the cross. Christ is God, and the Spirit of God puts the life and light, and love of Christ within us. And that's honey! that's pleasure! that's happiness! that's real and unfailing joy! To this I bear honest witness, in company with millions of saved souls who have found honey! And so do the saints of God in glory. That is the land typified by the Canaan of milk and honey, the happy land where there is fulness of joy and pleasures—pleasures for evermore!

I tell you, young men, that if you have not found Christ, you still lack the sweetest pleasure, the richest honey of all—a honey which, mingled with all the other sweets of life, enriches them and makes them sweeter still. To the soul that accepts the salvation and the kingship of Jesus, any rock shall flow with good, and from the carcase of every slain lion, either of lust, enemy, or temptation, shall come forth honey, as from Samson's lion laid dead on Timnath road! And this pleasure hath no dregs. No possible serpent lies coiled in this cup. Those who have found this honey find it sweeter and richer at the close of life than ever they did before. You may enjoy, after a fashion, the "pleasures of sin for

a season." Then what? Then the days shall draw nigh when thou shalt say, "I have no pleasure in them!" And in the hour of thy darkest sorrow there shall shine on thee neither sun nor star! I want honey that shall endure. A lady once wrote to Lord Byron, urging on him the necessity of religion, and praying him to forsake the paths of sin. Did you ever read his answer?

"I thank you for your interest in me; I am bound to say that all who entertain your belief in God and religion have a tremendous advantage; for it not only affords consolations during life, but even if there is no hereafter, it smoothes the downward course of life, and takes from death its darkness and its fear!" Do you hear it?—you professed despisers of religion! On your own showing, and according to your own miserable "no-creed," we have more honey than you, more pleasure than you; honey that is sweet and good, even when death darkens our door, and the grave is opening for our clay! But there is an eternity. You are immortal, and in your deepest consciousness lies an instinctive assurance that you will never die.

In the name of my God, I offer you pleasures to-day, honey to-day; a hive of honey, sweet and delightful, and that will endure when youth hath fled, when flowers have faded, when sum-

mer is past, when life's fair fruits have perished, when the winter of age blows cold and chill, and when death itself draws nigh. The pleasures of religion grow: they expand with time, and strengthen with the eternal years. In Saxony there is a royal treasure-chamber, whose most precious contents is a polished chest. Within the chest there lies a silver egg: a secret spring reveals in it a golden yolk. Within this lies a bird, whose wing being pressed exposes a golden crown, studded with jewels, and that again flies open and displays a precious diamond of untold worth. The treasures of real religion are more wonderful than that. Day after day reveals brighter gifts and greater joys. Trouble shall touch one spring, tears shall unclasp a second, prayers shall press a third, faith and patience shall ever unfold still sweeter joys, and at last even death itself shall only press the final spring. The last covering flies open, and lo! eternal stores of richest honey, fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore! Hast thou found honey? Lo! it flows on Calvary from the Rock!—"the Rock of Ages cleft for thee!"

## XVI.

*SPRING-TIDE THOUGHTS.*

“He preached unto them Jesus and the Resurrection.”—ACTS  
xvii. 18.

“JESUS and the Resurrection.” I am much in the habit, when I can get into rural regions, of visiting the quiet and secluded churchyard, where “the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.” Epitaph-reading is not always, or even often, an improving exercise; but the graves themselves are instructive pages, and the green sod impearled with daisies, or the few simple flowers on the grave carefully tended—these can, and do always preach to me; and so does the spire of the village church, which casts a shadow in the westering sun, just in proportion as it points, with high, uplifted pinnacle, into the heaven above;—not the only case, thank God, that the deeper shadows are near akin to the heavenlier hopes. But sometimes one meets a rare exception to the exquisite doggrel of the monumental poet. Such an one I met with the other day.



On the grave fresh-cut flowers were laid, and at the head and foot a rosebush and a fuchsia grew. A tall headstone was covered with inscriptions, for it was a family grave, and nearly all the household were lying there at rest. There an old patriarch reposed, aged eighty-three. Side by side slept the parents of the family, aged respectively fifty-three and fifty-nine, while a daughter of twenty years, and another of sixteen, and a son of mature years, all lay within that house of rest. Beneath the lowest name I read the text: "These all died in the faith." What faith? The next inscription gave the triumphant answer: "Jesus and the Resurrection!" I thought of the first Easter morning and the empty tomb; I thought of the white-haired sire and the delicate flower nipped in her teens by the wind's untimely blast; I thought of my own dead treasures; I looked at the flowers, just fresh from winter sleep, which were nodding their sanction to "THE FAITH." "Jesus and the Resurrection!" I said aloud, and, turning to the little gate, I saw a funeral—a little coffin, with fair young girls in white to carry it—and, as I stood with uncovered head, the clergyman came with open book, and read: "I am the Resurrection and the Life!" and when they laid the little oaken casket in the earth, I knew that they were sowing a seed in God's Acre ready for

the general spring-tide by and by. Yes, "Jesus and the Resurrection" will serve not only as a motto for Easter Week, not only as a motto for the photograph you sometimes look upon with tears, but for the gravestone which marks the place where Lazarus sleepeth, or the little human flower is sown.

"O Saviour ! still they live in our affection,  
We love them still ;  
Saith Jesus, ' Still they dwell in My protection,  
And safe from ill.'  
Believe in Jesus and the Resurrection ;  
Faith cries, ' I WILL ! ' "

I feel a strong sense of gratitude to the God of all grace that, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, He so willed it that the resurrection of my Lord from the dead should take place in the spring-tide of the year. I have just returned from a three days' sojourn in the country, and it has seemed to me that the doctrine of the Resurrection has been preached to me by a thousand voices in a thousand sermons, rich in beauty, full of conviction, argument, and hope. In the woods and the fields, and even on the embankments of the railway, the soil, which a short time ago was dry and bare, with winter's dead and frigid hand upon it, was everywhere besprinkled with the flowers of spring. The warm and winsome sun had sent his magic beams right

down into the dark, with this message: "Awake! Awake! Awake!" The balmy southern breezes had wooed the dormant, dull, and lifeless plant, and whispered, as it blew, "Come forth! Come forth!" And the earth itself, as if ashamed of being jailer to such lavish life and beauty, said: Arise! Arise!" And so the green sod, ere March had scarcely passed, was garnished with daisies, while those pale heralds of the spring, the primroses, were literally scattered by the million, as if ten thousand angels had waved their wings above, and shaken down a shower of golden sheen. "I never seed so many o' they primroses in all my life," said an aged peasant, as we stood gazing on a bank that seemed paved with gold. Well, we know through all the stern, hard, biting, murderous winters which for years past have made our climate almost arctic cold, these spring beauties, these pale heralds of hope and promise, have scarcely been seen at all. Yet a little earlier sun, a little warmer wind, a little less frowning sky, hath been enough to fetch out of their graves these floral glories which for years have been hid behind the strongest gates of brass, "cribbed, cabined, and confined" in the darkest dungeons, long buried in frozen graves! Even while, in sheer laddish delight, I was plucking these delicate blooms, I was led to watch the merry movements of two sulphur-

winged butterflies, which seemed to be vying with each other as to which could show the most of quick, joyous, and exultant life! These, I knew, had lain for many a month—a little, milky, semi-transparent liquid, confined in a little brown dead shell. Yet a few of the sun's bright rays had been enough to animate the dormant germ, to crack the dingy coffin case, and to float into the sunlight a new creation, redolent with life and happiness. So living beauty on the wing, and living beauty on the sod, preached to me a sermon—an Easter sermon—full of conviction, of comfort, and of hope. On the first Easter morning, the Flower of Humanity, fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, broke through the prison crust, and bloomed in the garden of the sepulchre. Such were His commanding charms, His matchless fragrance, that weeping Mary cries out aloud for joy. It is not for nothing that he is called the "Rose of Sharon" and the "Lily of the Valley." It was an awful winter, stern and wild, that blighted this Rose and snapped this Lily, and men judged the Flower of Humanity to be dead for evermore. But on the first Easter morning it rose in bright immortal bloom, first-fruits of a whole paradise of flowers, and herald of a springtide which is to deepen into a glorious summer time, on whose immortal bloom no winter

time will ever, ever breathe either blighting or decay. The ancient Athenian and the modern caviller laugh at the Resurrection, as a mystery too great for aught but credulity to accept. Have they solved, then, the mystery of the transformation of the inanimate chrysalis into the winged splendour that sips honey from the flowers? Have they explained in terms the revivifying process by which the dead, cold hand of winter ungrasps its victims, to wear once more the charming glow of summer life? Have they solved the subtle riddle as to what power lies along the border line between life and no life? Or have they not, as Professor Tyndall has, declared that it utterly baffles keenest scientific search. Away with this nonsense of laughing mystery out of doors! It must end in laughing out their own existence, for which neither physics nor metaphysics can account, and are simply powerless to explain. Let them expound the tremendous mystery how the wheat grain dies, with the furrows for a grave, and yet produces life a hundred-fold from the husk-coffin in which it is confined. Until then—*Jesus and the Resurrection* is a fact as unassailable as it is glorious. That is the pillar and ground of the Christian faith. No sane man under heaven can doubt that Jesus lived, taught, laboured, was crucified, dead, and buried. These are his-

toric facts, just as capable of proof as that Herod ruled, that Pilate governed, that Cæsar conquered, or that Napoleon fought. *But did He rise again?* THAT is the one question, and the answer, YES or NO, makes the Christian faith either the grandest truth in the history of humanity, or the most outrageous lie.

If ever corpse was carefully interred, vigilantly guarded, and deception made impossible, it was the body of the Christ;—about which the devil fought more fiercely than he ever did with Michael for the body of Moses among the hills of Moab. If this reported fact that Jesus rose from the dead can be successfully attacked, the whole superstructure of Christianity, built on a fabric of fraud, must collapse like a house of cards. Times without number, candid and capable apologists and defenders of the Christian faith have avowed this. “This,” they say, “is the citadel in which we are entrenched. It is the one vital point, the central pivot, the very marrow of New Testament revelation. Now, go to work—overhaul the records. Pass every witness through the straitest sieve, the keenest fire, to test their candour and their truth. Pick every practical hole in their separate and combined evidence. Marshal all that can be said to prop up the theory of theft, for swearing to which the Roman guards were so heavily bribed. Disprove the

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facts of Christ's resurrection. Then we will throw down our weapons, yield up our sword, and own the Christian legend to be an exploded lie!"

Through eighteen hundred years, the foes of Christianity have done their best or worst to capture this Gibraltar Rock of Fact, but it has defied assault, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. And on this Easter morn the angel of truth sits calm as ever, strong as ever, on the stone which was rolled away from the door of the sacred sepulchre, and boldly proclaims the glorious news: "*He is not here! He is risen, as He said!*"

We are in the habit of linking the names of the great with the great deeds they have done. Clive and Plassy, Wellington and Waterloo. This Easter morning the greatest of all names shall be linked to the grandest of all victories—JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION! He is declared to be the Son of God with Power, by the resurrection from the dead. Power! Power to atone; to pardon; to save! Power! Power to make holy, to make happy, to make immortal! To-day, the Man Christ Jesus, Conqueror of sin, Victor over death, Spoiler of the grave, is passed into the heavens, and sitteth with the keys at His girdle, the sceptre in His hand, the crown upon His head—Jehovah's fellow, Humanity's

brother, our God and our Saviour, Redeemer and Friend !

Jesus and the Resurrection ! Take it not only as a motto, but a watchword. Plunge into your life-battles with this word upon your lips, for He who rolled away this stone can roll every other from your path. Shout it, as your pilgrim feet tramp along the shadows—aye, even in the valley of death. Life from the dead is in that word, and immortality ! Surely this is the song of Moses and the Lamb, which rings out along the streets of the New Jerusalem, and is wafted across the happy plains of heaven. “Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously ! The” pale “horse and his rider hath he cast into the depths of the sea !”

Paul proclaimed it on the Hill of Mars, and all the world shall hear it, till our Risen Lord, our Prince Immanuel, comes into His own again—comes to hush the loud laughter of unbelief, or drown it in the voices of exultant saints !

“JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION !”



## XVII.

*HIS OWN!*

"Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end."—JOHN xiii. 1.

HAVING related so much of the Saviour's life and teaching as was called for by his main design, the Apostle is about to record the solemn events which transpired during the last three days of our Lord's life on earth. He is about to conduct us into the valley of humiliation, dark with the shadow of death ; to follow the track of the "Man of griefs," and tell the story of His bitter sorrow, His holy patience, His amazing love. The aged patriarch calls up vivid memories of those sad, sweet, sorrowful days. He hears again the matchless tones of that loving voice, sees again the gleam of that loving eye, and under the influence of an unrestrainable rush of feeling he writes—"When Jesus knew that His hour was come, that He should depart out of the world to go unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end."

The Saviour has a treasure of immortal spirits who are not in the world. The gleaming hosts of heaven standing round the sapphire throne, or speeding through the universe on some imperial mission, all are His own ; He is their King and Lord ; they are those ministers of His that do His pleasure. All the sainted spirits of the just made perfect, who, no longer in the world, but promoted to a higher state, raise rapturous acclaim in honour of their Redeemer King, "all are His own." The other sheep He has which are "not of this fold," are a multitude which no man can number. Very faint are our largest conceptions of the extent of Christ's spiritual possessions. Vast beyond compare is His moral empire, the number of existences who call Him "Lord."

This verse, however, shows the relationship of Jesus to His faithful and genuine followers who "are in the world." These disciples of whom John speaks were no monopolists of the love of Christ. They were the representatives of the Church for all after-time. The sentiment of the verse is unchangeably true. The lapse of time in no way affects the spirit of its teaching. It may change the tense, but it does not change the sense of the gracious truth,—“Having loved His own which are in the world, He loves them to the end.”

I.—*The Disciples of Jesus are called by a peculiarly endearing Name—"His Own."* Mark the force of this expression. All things are His own. He is the universal Proprietor. He saith elsewhere, "All souls are Mine," even the rebellious and unthankful. Here, however, the words have a special significance, and imply a relationship of the dearest and closest kind. They express at once His intensest love and His highest appreciation. A true mother has a kindly sympathy for all children; but there is a singular depth of meaning in her words, as she looks into the eyes of the darling of her heart, and says, "My own!" The gift in the hand of a child is wondrously enhanced in value by the idea of absolute possession, and its attractiveness receives a new and brighter glamour when it is understood to be his "very own." With such intense affection and delight, with such a rejoicing sense of possession does Christ regard His people. He constantly challenges them in this fashion: "My brethren," "My sheep," "My friends," and emphatically, "Mine."

1. *They are His own as the purchase of His blood.* They had sold themselves for nought, were sold under sin, were in the grasp and power of a dishonoured law; and they were redeemed without money. Christ was their Redeemer, their "Buyer-back;" and the price

was not silver or gold, but His own precious blood. He gave His life a ransom for them, and they are become His purchased possession. "Ye are not your own," says Paul, and hence he pleads that we should glorify God with our bodies and our spirits "which are His."

"He justly claims us for 'His own,'  
Who bought us with a price;  
The Christian lives to Christ alone,  
To Christ alone he dies."

2. *They are His own by willing personal surrender.* In order that the soul may thus especially be His own, this is an all-essential endorsement of His claim. The price of his freedom may be proffered to the slave, but if he will not accept it he is still in bonds. Christ hath purchased all souls. Yet it needs the assent of their understanding, and the full consent of their will, in order to bind them to Him by this special tie and to make them peculiarly His own. The Christian hath made a solemn transfer of himself to his Lord. "Son, give me thine heart," said the Saviour, and the believer responded eagerly, entirely—

"Take my poor heart, and let it be  
For ever closed to all but Thee."

3. *They bear the name, seal, and image of the Saviour.* They are called by His name, and thus make universal acknowledgment that

“He beareth rule over them.” “After that ye believed,” says the Apostle, “ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, until the redemption of His purchased possession.” When the Jews sought to entangle Jesus in His talk, they asked, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar?” At His request a Roman coin was produced. “Whose image and superscription is this?” They say, “Cæsar’s.” “Then give Cæsar his own,” was the decisive and unanswerable reply. The believer is created anew in Christ Jesus. He bears His likeness; he is conformed to His image; he has received the fixed impress of assurance and resemblance; and as Christ recognises the saving and proprietary sign, He acknowledges “His own.”

4. *They are His own as the gift of the Father*, the reward of His mediatorial work. The believer, conscious of his own unworthiness, can scarcely dare to accept a doctrine so wonderful as this—that the Father regards him as a precious treasure, a prize to be conferred upon His well-beloved Son; that the Son regards him as a much-to-be-desired and satisfying reward! In the seventeenth chapter of this Gospel we see how the Saviour cheered His own soul, and gathered strength and comfort from the thought of this prospective possession. ! He rolls the words under His tongue like a sweet morsel. “I have

manifested Thy name to the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world. Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me." "I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." In view of this joy that was set before Him, impelled by this Divine love and compassion, He said, "Lo! I come; I delight to do Thy will, O Lord!" And to-day, as the Redeemer watches the gathering souls of saved humanity flying home to His rest like doves to their windows, He sees with boundless satisfaction the results of His earthly travail, brings each new-comer to the Father, saying, "All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them."

Christian! see your high and holy calling! The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself. Oh, loving Saviour—

"To Thee our hearts and hands we give;  
Thine may we die, Thine may we live."

II.—*The Temporary Position of Christ's Own!* "In the world." When a sinner is converted, his conscience cleansed, his heart renewed, his soul filled with joy; when all is right for death, and all is safe for heaven, how desirable it seems that he should be removed out of the world, taken at once to heaven and blessed with

quietness and assurance for ever ! That cleansed conscience will soon again be stained with sin ; the fine gold of that first love will become dim ; the thoroughfares of that new heart will again be trodden by unclean feet, and the joy and peace which are so bright to-day will be dashed with sorrow and dissolve in tears. Would it not be better for him if the moment of his conversion should be the moment of his glorification ? Let him be taken away from the evil to come that he may never run the hazard of losing so rich a prize. Amid the cares and troubles of life the Christian pilgrim is often tempted to become wearied of his lot, and to say, " Oh that I had the wings of a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest ! " But the Lord keeps " His own," mark you, in the world. Dear as they are to Him, much as He delights in them, yet they are kept here for a season by His own appointment, and for high and holy ends.

1. *They are in the world for their own sake.* Eternal life is the gift of God unmerited and free ; yet the Christian's future will be largely influenced by the tone and character of his life on earth. According to his spiritual growth, his moral victories, his love and sacrifice and service, will be the fulness of the glory which shall be revealed. Here the believer has to wage the warfare, and for each occasion wherein he

has vanquished an enemy, surmounted a difficulty, withstood an attack or borne a trial, a higher and better guerdon is stored up for "him that overcometh" when the day of God shall come. We may lay up treasure here for our enrichment there. Here the godly use of the unrighteous mammon may multiply our friends in heaven. Every affliction may aid in working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The right employment of every talent, every act of faithfulness and self-sacrificing love, is invested capital which will bear rare and growing interest in the currency which obtains in the city of the saints, and which bears the superscription of the King of kings.

2. *They are in the world for the Saviour's sake.* The world holds Him in dishonour, and gives His glory to another. True religion is disparaged, Christ's honour assailed, and His name discredited, yea, even in the house of His friends. The Saviour was His own answer to His traducers while He lived on earth. "Which of you convicteth Me of a sin?" He asked, and none could make a reply. They say, "He hath a devil!" but then, "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" Christ is now ascended into heaven, and He hath given His Holy Name, His spotless fame, His beautiful character and high pretensions into the keeping of His Church



and people. The Christians are in the world to represent the Saviour! They bear His name, they wear His robes, they reflect His image; and their holy duty is to bear the name without dishonour, to wear the robe without a stain, and to see to it that the image they reflect is not distorted, but a perfect likeness of the meek and lowly Jesus, the mild and holy Pattern Man. When the Saviour prayed to the Father on behalf of His own, He said, "The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them, that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me."

3. *They are in the world for the world's sake.* The world cannot spare the Christians. Its only hope lies in the element of godliness which is slowly leavening it more and more. Ten godly men in Sodom would have saved it from the rain of fire. To righteous Paul God gave all the lives of those who sailed with him, though the ship went to pieces in the storm. "Ye are the salt of the earth," said the Saviour to His own; and without that healthful savour, that intersprinkling of godly influence, the race would rapidly deteriorate into a state of moral putrefaction, and render needful the coming of the final fire.

"And I saw," writes John in the Apocalypse, "another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a

loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." The presence of the godly in the earth, then, restrains the avenging angels in their work of ruin.

Further. The Christian is "in the world" that he may labour for its well-being and use his whole influence for the moral and spiritual uplifting of our race. In this respect the Christian's life is endowed with a value unspeakably precious. The necessities are immense, the possibilities are wonderful. "Go, work," said the Master, "and as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of God is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils, freely ye have received, freely give."

"Such our whole employment be,  
Works of faith and charity :  
Works of love on man bestowed,  
Secret intercourse with God."

III.—*The Saviour's unchanging Love for His Own.* "He loved them to the end." These disciples of His, from the day He called them from taxing-table and fishing-net, saying, "Follow Me," had been the objects of tenderest regard. They were full of faults and failings, displayed much envy and self-seeking, were sadly slow of

heart to receive the truth; yet in and through all He loved them with an affection the most tender and endearing. Now that the time is at hand when the bitter cup shall be lifted to His lips, and the horror of a thick darkness shall gather on His soul: now, when the powers of hell enter into deadliest league against Him, and the shadow of the cross looms dark and dreadful, His love for them, His anxiety for their well-being is the foremost feeling of His heart. His prayer to His Father has them for its burden from first to last. At that sweetly solemn gathering in the upper room, just previous to the horrors of Gethsemane and the sufferings of the cross, He pours into their ears the richest strains of comfort and consolation. "Let not your hearts be troubled." "In My Father's house are many mansions." "I go to prepare a place for you." "I will come again and receive you to Myself." "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." "Peace I leave with you." He promises them a Comforter, tells them their sorrow shall be turned to joy, and bids them "be of good cheer." In the sacred garden, His gentle forbearance to the unwatchful Three who slept when their Friend groaned in the agony of mental travail, reveals the fixity and depth of His love. When the officers came with swords and staves to take Him, He wards His trembling

disciples from the threatening crowd, enters at once on His isolated path and stands out from them, saying, "I am He. If ye seek Me, then let these go their way." Their desertion of Him in that hour was a sharper pang than any made by jailer's scourge or soldier's spear. And yet it was wounded affection, and quenchless love, and tenderest pity that looked on recreant Peter and melted his soul to anguish and to tears. When He left the tomb in triumph, He gave the angel watchers at the cave a kindly message for His scattered and frightened flock, and with inimitable tenderness and thoughtful love mentioned the penitent denier of his Lord by name; and "Tell Peter also" came as special balsam for poor Simon's sore stricken and repentant soul!

And when at last they gathered round Him on the hill of Bethany, His latest movement was to lift His hands and bless them; His latest word a promise to be with them even to the end of the world; when a cloud received Him out of their sight, two angels stood before them in shining raiment—spared from His angelic envoy—to tell them that as they had seen Him ascend, so should He again descend, that He might receive them unto Himself! Afterwards, when seated at the right hand of God, Stephen's cry for help brought Him to His feet! He cleft

the floor of heaven, flashed a stream of glory on the dying saint, whose spirit straightway rose to the presence of his Lord, and amid the plaudits of the angels Jesus welcomed "His own" who had been "in the world," had accomplished his mission, and served his Lord!

Do you wonder that when the aged Apostle begins to write this matchless record of love and grace, that when his divinely-aided memory called up each look and tone, each deed and word that marked his Saviour's later days, the grey head should bow beneath a rush of feeling, the flowing tears should fall fast upon the parchment, and that with a gush of unrestrained devotion he should write, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end?"

"Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." Believer, you are in the holy and the privileged succession. He loves you with an abiding love. Your memory bears grateful witness. You will never forget the hour when first this love rejoiced your heart. Many a commemorative Ebenezer stands out upon the way in which He hath led you, and tells how His love, ever precious, did come in as a flood in the hour of your sorest need. Your backslidings have been many; your imperfections more, but His love hath endured through all. Your trials

and temptations have been fierce and heavy, but His love sustained you, and to-day the love of Jesus in your heart is your glory and joy. Be of good cheer. He will never leave you. He will love you to the end. You are hidden in His heart, engraven on His hands. He will brood over you in danger. He will comfort you in trouble. He will guide you in perplexity. He will uphold your soul in life, through all the vicissitudes of your earthly sojourn. He will draw closer and dearer as the end draws nigh; and in your dying hour He will clasp you in His arms and bear you to your heritage of bliss. There you will be for ever with the Lord!

Seek a closer, more perfect union with your Saviour. Be "His own" entirely. Let your consecration be cheerful and complete. While you are "in the world" make the most and best of your probation. Grow in grace and lay up in store a good foundation for the time to come. Be very jealous for the honour of your Lord. Witness a good confession. Adorn His doctrines by your walk and conversation, that men may glorify Him in you. Pray and work and deny yourself; ay, and suffer, if need be, if by any means you can "save some," and leave a fructifying influence for good when your days are done. Remember that your loving and faithful Lord hath said, "To him that overcometh

will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Sinner ! you are not in this saving sense "His own." You will not have Him to reign over you. There shall come a day when you would have Him, and when He shall publicly disown you, though you would fain be friends. No ; you are not His own. Then whose are you ? In whose service ? Under whose influence and control ? You are a servant of the devil, led captive at his will. Do you know whither he is leading his captive ? The wages of sin is death ! Yet the Saviour loves you ! He died for you. He follows in your track, seeking, calling, with a view to save you ! How He pleads for you ! Will you reject such mercy ? Will you trample on such love ? He loves ! He pleads ! He waits ! Fall at His feet, ask for His mercy, trust in His love, give Him your heart, then you shall be "His own." His love shall fill your pardoned soul, and He will love you to the end !

## XVIII.

*"THE SMILE OF GOD."*

"And thou shalt be a blessing."—GEN. xii. 2.

I HAVE seen in an African desert a beautiful patch of green, a luxurious blending of graceful palm, waving grass, rippling spring, pendent fruits and tropic flowers—an island of verdure, refreshment, and comfort in the midst of a sea of sand, of dreary brushwood and of stunted thorn. Hither came both man and beast, hot with travel, scorched with heat, oppressed with hunger, faint with thirst, and found food and drink, shelter and repose. The negroes who dwelt in the surrounding region called the weary tract around "THE TORMENT," because it was hard, dry, difficult, inhospitable. The patch of natural garden-ground in the centre they called by an African word which means a god or a spirit in a good temper, or rather, the smile of God. The smile of God! Verily a good name and a beautiful; a smile that lightens the heart and cheers the lot of every drooping traveller that passes



that way. As he gazes with hand-shaded eyes through the haze of the desert heat, and catches a glimpse of the green isle upon the border line, that smile of God begets a smile on his own tired and weary face, and with quickened step and hopeful eye he presses thitherward and rejoices in its cool and grateful shade! It may well be called "The Smile of God!"

Just what that green oasis is to the tribes of Ham, the God-trusting, God-fearing man is to his fellow-men, a centre of blessing, a precious possession, nothing other, nothing less than the "Smile of God."

When Abram was commanded to leave his country and his father's house, and follow in simple faith the leadings of Divine Providence, a fivefold blessing was promised to his obedience and trust. First, he should be the founder and father of a great nation. Second, he was to be the owner of immense resources. Third, he was to be protected, sustained, and guided in all his affairs and among all his enemies. Fourth, his name was to be made great and famous. Fifth, and lastly, he was to be made a blessing to his own people and to the nations of the earth. That is to say, he was to have the blazon of history, the glamour of wealth, the favour of men, the glory of honour, and was to be—a blessing—nothing less than the smile of God. That is the

best and richest gift of all. Compared with that, historic fame, gleam of gold, smile of men, halo of honour, are no more than Jack-o'-Lantern flashes that are seen, admired, and then die out into the dark. To *be* a blessing, to catch, and keep, and reflect the smile of God, is a glory that excelleth, a joy that abideth, an honour that endureth, a crown of glory, that, like the fire pillar, grows more divinely luminous as the shadows darken, gains a sevenfold glory by the light touch of death, and shines immortal and with ever-growing lustre before the throne of God!

To none of us may come the former bestowments, and none of us will live the sadder or die the poorer for the want of them. We shall never be like Abraham—the father of a people, or the founder of a nation, or the progenitors of kings, or the wearers of a deathless name; but to all of us, the least and meanest, may come by right and favour, to the patriarch's greatest, grandest, most enduring title, "*the friend of God.*"

And he who is the "friend of God" shall live in the smile of God; and he who lives in the smile of God shall ~~BE~~ the smile of God,—a blessing, an oasis in the wilderness, a fountain in the desert, a star in the night of human tears and grief.

I hold that all true religion, all true manhood,

the very core and marrow of Christianity, centres here, that man should be *in himself*, in his thought and purpose, in his word and deed, in his place and lot, in his life and death, a blessing to his fellow-men. It is only in proportion as our Christianity is the death of our selfishness, the destruction of all aims and motives which are either opposed or indifferent to the best interests of others, the inspiration and performance of deeds beneficial to others, that it fulfils its mission in our own souls, makes us like our perfect human Pattern, and secures and retains for us the favour and blessing of our God.

Pointing to the little band of disciples to whom it was given to know the saving truths He taught, and singling them out from all the world besides, the Saviour said, "Ye are the light of the world." In them He had kindled a moral flame, the glow of a spiritual fire, not merely that they might sit around the place, and say, "Aha! I am warm," not that they might pick their solitary and exclusive way through the light of it. Let your light *shine*, so shine that men may see it; that men may see it in your *works*; that men may see it in your good works, that, willy-nilly, overpowered and convinced, they in their turn may be led to glorify God by the reception and reflection of the same

celestial light. It is not enough that you carry your light in a dark lantern, and flash it out on a Sunday, or on some occasion of special feeling, and then withdraw it as suddenly, to leave blinking spectators rather more uncertain as to your moral whereabouts than before; but rather like the electric flame, which is only toned down by the medium in which it burns, your humanity should exhibit the veiled but glowing light of life and love Divine that dwells behind. I remember seeing, on a certain festive occasion, nearly a thousand men marching through the streets of a northern city when the clock in the minster steeple was tolling out the midnight hour. Neither moon nor star appeared in the sombre sky, and the lamps along the streets were but as twinkling beads of light which vainly tried to lighten the gloom of the dull November air. But wherever the procession went, wherever the tramping of their feet was heard, the light, clear, full, and brilliant, lit up the streets and houses, illumined statues, and was flashed back from every window and every gilded sign. Every face shone bright, every form stood clear, and the dull, dark night, right up into the gloom above, glowed and gleamed as with the light of morn. How was this? Every man carried a pitch-pine torch; each flashed its little measure of light upon the

sombre gloom, and altogether they conquered darkness and created day!

As a disciple of Christ, it is given to the Christian, not so much to carry a torch as to *be* a torch. He himself is to be set alight, and is to move in and out through the world's sad shadow-land, a peripatetic illumination, showing the beauty of goodness—dispensing the knowledge of God. Let me quote a noble sentence or two from Robert Hall: "He who diffuses the most happiness, and mitigates the most distress within his own circle, is undoubtedly the best friend to his own country and the world; since nothing more is necessary than for all men to imitate his conduct, to make the greatest part of the misery of the world to cease in a moment. While the passion of some is to shine, of some to govern, and of others to accumulate; let one great passion alone inflame our breasts—the passion which reason ratifies, which conscience approves, which Heaven inspires—that of being and doing good." Oh, to be thoroughly and profoundly conscious of our mission—to be possessed by it, and, in the fulness of a consecrated nature, to *be* a blessing all the time! Ye parents, be a living benediction on your children. They, at any rate, bask in your favour, and rejoice in your smile. Never forget that you can be the smile of God upon them, and exert an influence as silent as the sun-

light and as powerful, an influence that shall attract them truthward, Godward, heavenward! Yours, O Christian, be it to exhibit all holy virtues, all kindly charities, all manly attributes, all Christly compassions, all Godly speech and deed; and remember that if you are to be a true Christian, an Israelite indeed, the friend of God, the disciple of Christ, the heritor of heaven—you are to be—must be—A BLESSING! It is not enough that you are not a curse, that you do no ill and work no harm. The poisonous upas-tree and the barren fig-tree shall both be cast into the fire. The captured rebel, caught red-handed, and the sentinel asleep at his post, alike are doomed. To cease to do evil is only the lesser half of the Christian's code of law—he must learn to do well.

"It is not they who idly dwell  
In cloister grey or empty cell,  
In prayer or vigil night and day,  
Wearing all their prime away,  
Lord of heaven, that serve Thee well.

Sitting listening on the shore  
To the ocean's restless roar,  
Never launching on the main—  
*Can* the merchant hope to gain  
Wealth to swell his treasure store?

Vain it were to watch beside  
The pit where we our talent hide;  
We must face the noise and strife  
Of the market-place of life,  
Good and faithful, true and tried.

Open hand and willing heart,  
To salve the wound and heal the smart,  
To lift the fallen, and to dry  
Tears that fall from Sorrow's eye—  
*That is Heaven's counterpart."*

Note, again, that just in proportion as a Christian is a blessing, he HAS a blessing. Kind words, they say, have kind echoes, but that is not all the truth. The echoes are more musical than the original, because God mingles a benediction in the tone. It is hard to say whether the sea or the land is the greater gainer by the race for giving: the sea into which the silver streams are rolled, or the land on which the jewels of the clouds are scattered, like the largess of a king.

"And the more thou spendest  
From thy little store,  
With a double bounty,  
God will give thee more."

"In the Holy Land," says Krummacher, in a capital parable, "there lived a man, called Eliab, whom God had blessed with earthly goods; he was also cunning in all the wisdom of the East. But all this could not bring peace to his heart; he was often full of sorrow and wished to die. Then a man of God came to him, and showed him an herb possessed of wonderful healing virtues. But Eliab said, 'What is that to me? My body lacks not health, my soul is diseased;

it were better for me to die.' 'The herb will do thy heart good,' said the man of God; 'take it, and go and heal seven sick men with it; then, if thou wilt, thou mayest die.' Eliab did as he was told, and went and sought out misery in its hiding-places. He healed seven sick people, and succoured the poor with his riches. Then the man of God came again to him and said, 'Here is an herb of death; now thou mayest die.' 'God forbid!' cried Eliab; 'my soul longs no more for death, *now* only have I discovered the joy of life.'" Every Christian has that herb, and in proportion as he *is* a blessing, he *has* a blessing—a fourfold blessing, the approval of his conscience, the smile of his God, the love of his kind, and the dear delights of doing good.

I have said that the Christian is to *be* a blessing; that according as he *is* a blessing he *has* a blessing; but before all this comes something else. It is said of Abram, "Thou shalt be a blessing;" but there are vital words before that. Hark! "I will bless thee." That's how it is. Neither Abram nor you can either *be* a blessing or *have* a blessing, in the full, clear, and joyous sense, unless it be imparted from above. If this stream of blessing is to rise in your own soul, ripple along your pathway, and cool the lips of others in its flow, then all your springs must be in God. He must be all and in all—He, the



God from whom all blessings flow. Here and now we may all receive the gracious gift. Let us gather round the cross ! Let us kneel before the Lord, with Esau's cry upon our lips, "Hast thou not a blessing for me ? Bless me, even me also, O my father !" Like Abram, let us believe and loyally obey. Then, being blessed of the Lord, we shall be blessed indeed ; shall *be* a blessing ; shall *have* a blessing ; and, like the sun, our course shall be

" Right away down to the golden west,  
Bountiful, beautiful, blessing and blest ! "

## XIX.

*GREAT MULTITUDES.*

“And great multitudes came unto Him.”—*MATT. xv. 30.*

**THERE** are a few places in this beautiful world that I dearly wish to see. First, I think, and foremost, the “Sea of Galilee.” Of seeing Scripture towns and villages I am not particularly enamoured. I am told by those who have seen them that the glamour which they possess in my imagination would be rudely dispelled if I once saw them as they are. But this cannot be true of the sacred scenery of Galilee. Those blue waters, reflecting the sapphire sky; those holy hills which girdle the lake on which the feet of my Redeemer once trod the waves in kingly power—these, at any rate, remain bright with beauty and fair in the quiet grace they wore in the hallowed days when Jesus sojourned there. Whenever I think of them, the lines of Robert M’Cheyne come to my mind:—

“How pleasant to me thy deep blue wave, O Sea of Galilee !  
For the glorious One who came to save hath often stood by  
thee.

Fair are the lakes in the land I love, where pine and heather  
grow,  
But thou hast loveliness far above what Nature can bestow.

It is not that the wild gazelle comes down to drink thy tide,  
But He that was pierced to save from hell oft wandered by thy  
side.

It is not that the fig-tree grows, or palm, in thy soft air,  
But that Sharon's fair and bleeding Rose once shed its fragrance  
there.

Graceful, around thee, the mountains meet, thou calm, reposing  
sea ;  
But, ah ! far more, the beautiful feet of Jesus walked o'er  
thee ! ”

The incidents narrated in Matthew xv. 30-39 took place by the Sea of Galilee, and my imagination vainly endeavours to picture the thrilling and attractive scene. “And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the Sea of Galilee.” Where had He been ? He had just returned from a long and tedious journey, far away from Galilee, into the bleak and stony north, along the unfriendly coasts of Tyre and Sidon. So far as the record shows, that laborious travel was undertaken to cast out one devil from the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, the poor woman that hungered like a dog for a crumb or two of the bread which was so plentiful on the tables of Galilee ! Having dropped those precious crumbs to that *one* poor, needy Gentile, he re-tracks the weary miles again to feed whole

multitudes at once! *One* needy soul, one aching heart, however poor, can bring on an errand of love and mercy the glorious Lord Divine!

“He went up into a mountain, and sat down there.” There’s a picture for you. I see Him seated on the hill-slope; above Him, the blue sky, the canopy which His hand had stretched like a curtain; westward glides the sun, whose fires He had kindled, and whose royal glory is but a shadow of His own: around Him lies the girdle of green hills, whose rocky foundations He had laid, and whose towering crests His hands have lifted to the skies; down below, the deep blue waves of Galilee which lie in the hollow of His hand, reflect on its clear breast the clouds which are His chariot; and the cool breezes of the evening time, like attendant slaves, fan the lordly brow which, by and bye, is to be disfigured by the crucifiers’ crown of thorns. “He sat down there.” On the mountain, that all comers might observe Him! On a mountain, that all comers might hear Him! On a mountain, that all needy ones might have access to Him! The approaches to the royalty of earth are strictly guarded—the vestibules of pontiffs and of princes may not be overpassed; the ante-chambers of the great physicians can only be entered by a golden key. Oh, what bars and barriers; what cards and formulas; what bribes

and diplomacy are required to gain an entrance to the world's most envied shrines! What fees, favours, forms, friends at court. Jesus, King Jesus, Prince Immanuel, Bishop of Souls, the Great Physician!—He sits upon a mountain—a mountain, all unfenced and free—and from the hill-top calls: “Come unto Me, **ALL** ye that labour, and I will give you rest!” “Come unto Me, all ye that are sick, and I will heal you!” “Come unto Me! look unto Me! and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth!”

“And great multitudes came unto Him.” His name and fame had gone through all that region. His wonderful works and marvellous words had won the hearts and homage of the common people, and so they follow, and crowd, and gather—multitudes of them. Stand on this neighbouring hill-brow, and watch them as they pass. This is but one contingent, one branch of the gathering crowd; for they come from every quarter, and troop from every place; but it is a specimen of all. What a motley multitude! Some, it is evident, are rich and well-to-do; some of them are poor, poor even to beggary. The flaunting turban and flowing robe point out the former—bare head and ragged garments make the latter clear; and, in and out, there move ever onward towards Jesus all the social grades that lie between these two extremes. Some

go limping by, aided by crutch, or staff, or stalwart shoulder of a friend; others grope their way with painful slowness and outstretched hands, as if to ward off a danger that they cannot see; while others, blind as they, venture more boldly, being led by the hand of son or daughter, relative or neighbour. Some helpless mortals are borne by four, on bed, or couch, or mattress; while others, seated on the shoulders of the strong of limb, are thus carried towards the mountain and the seated MAN! Here is a poor mother, panting along with a sick and puling baby in her arms, and there a father, bearing on his shoulders the sick, decrepit lad who cannot walk alone.

“Tramp, tramp, tramp! the dumb and halt and blind!  
Crawl, crawl, crawl! The cripples crawl on behind!  
Creep, creep, creep! The wounded, sick, and sore  
Still follow and falter, with weary step, the crowds who have  
gone before.

“And the air is heavy with cries of pain, and burdened with  
sighs and fears:

’Tis an army of suffering struggling on, and the way is wet  
with tears.”

“And great multitudes came unto Him.” All honour to those in that strange, sad procession who, hale and whole and hearty themselves, are bearers of another’s burdens—helpers of the helpless in this grand crisis of their need! Toil on, kind neighbours! plod on, good Samaritans!

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—for He who sits upon the mountain takes especial note of you. Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least and meanest of these wretched ones, ye are doing it to HIM—to HIM, the Master, who makes the meanest case His own.

Now, hasten, in your mind's eye, to look upon the central figure of this thrilling scene. The multitudes are rounding yon headland, threading that defile, pouring along this highway, streaming over yonder bill-top—are all converging on the Divine Man seated on the mountain slope. How does He receive them? Hark ye! “AND HE HEALED THEM ALL!” How brief the sentence! How easily slipped off the tongue! Some He touches; to some He speaks; on some He looks; towards some more distant ones He waves His arm; on many, without a motion or a glance, He sends the healing, but invisible, balsam of His grace. “And He healed them all”—in robes or rags, Pharisee or publican, greybeard or youth.

“The palsied rise in freedom strong,  
The dumb men talk and sing;  
And from blind eyes benighted long  
The beams of morning spring.”

Hark how the sighs, hushed for one moment into astonished silence, are changed into songs of gladness and psalms of praise! The grateful music, welling up from a multitude of rejoicing

hearts, is wafted across the waves of Galilee, and holds in wonder the startled ears of listening Gadarenes. What mutual congratulations! What grasping of hands! What tender embraces! Well might the multitude glorify the God of Israel! Surely, like the people on Mount Carmel, when the fire came down from heaven, the transformed and transported crowd were led to shout, as they gazed on the face of Jesus—"The Lord, He is the God! The Lord, He is the God!"

Now notice what followed. "Then Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and said, "I HAVE COMPASSION ON THE MULTITUDE." Compassion! Why, he *has* had compassion!—a great and all-embracing pity, which never rested until every groan was hushed and every tear was dried; until every palsied limb was lithe again, and every flaccid pulse beat out the throb of strong and vigorous health. Compassion! Why, He had covered them with a flood of it, as deep as the waters of the flowing lake below. And now He plans a new blessing—overwhelms them with a new benediction! To him that hath shall be given! And the multitude, healed of sickness and cured of disease, straightway sit down to a banquet, and satisfy their hunger to the full! I should have liked to hear their conversation that evening as they sat



on the green grass, with their bright, glad faces glowing in the soft light of the setting sun, eating the big rations of fish and bread that Jesus' expansive compassion had put into their hands.

“ There on the mount, beside the sea,  
By Galilee's blue wave,  
To thousands hungering wearily  
A wondrous meal He gave ;  
The Word, who all the world had made,  
To His own creatures spake ;  
'Twas springtide when He blest the bread,  
And harvest when He brake.”

Now comes the final sentence of my text—  
“ And He sent away the multitude.” Read the two sentences together—“ Great multitudes came to Him ”—“ He sent the multitude away.” The *same* multitude ! Yet how changed ! It was as if a July sun had shone upon a January landscape, and frost and snow and dreary barrenness had suddenly been replaced by summer green and gold, embellished with all the gay glories of summer flowers.

“ O, with what divers pains they met !  
O, with what joy they went away ! ”

Follow the departing crowds with the eye of your mind. How blithely they go ! How lightly they run ! Not a laggard among them ! while their mouths are filled with laughter and their tongue with singing. Is this jocund host

of travellers, who are so merrily homeward-bound, the pitiful pilgrim crew whose painful progress hitherward we saw just now? Yes, the very same. What hath made the difference? Why, that which can make as bright and glad difference to you—THEY HAVE BEEN TO JESUS! Read this lesson. They needed Him—they sought Him. He sat on a mountain, so as to be found of them. They found Him, and, finding Him, they found also an all-transforming joy. I tell you that Jesus sits upon a mountain whose slopes are all unfenced and free. Still the cry leaves His sacred lips—"Come unto me! I will give you rest." Bring your sins to Him—He will rid you of them. Bring your sorrows—He will soothe them. Bring your heartaches—He will cure them. Bring your fears—He will remove them. Bring your crosses—He will carry them. Bring your hunger and your thirst—He will satisfy them. You are not come to Sinai, with its awful crown of cloud and girdle of fire, but to Mount Zion. He is sat down here, waiting, waiting to see if you will come to Him. Great multitudes do come. He never complains, however great they are. You will come too? You are as welcome as anybody—not a chance of your being sent empty away. Some of you HAVE been before. Well, *you* know what to expect. Come again! Come, that you

may carry a new blessing home with you. Some of you have never come. By and by Jesus will rise from His place, and will not sit on the mount of mercy any more, but on the throne of judgment. Then you will be compelled to come, and join the multitude which He will send away. "Depart ye!" When that *sending* comes, whither will you go? What will you do? I beseech you hear His call—

"Come, and I will give you rest !  
Come, and I will save you all !"

## XX.

*THE BURNING BUSH.*

“Behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”—Ex. iii. 2.

“HE looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire.” Nothing very striking in that. You can reproduce such an appearance as that on any sun-scorched plain as well as that in Midian. ’Tis easily accomplished, and the crackling thorns will swiftly be reduced to ashes under your very eye. “And the bush was not consumed.” Ah! This is strange. The lambent flame shot up from stem to twig, and wrapped every branch in ribbons of fire. And yet the bush stood firm and strong, with every green leaf shimmering in its own firelight, which, instead of blackening them into shrivelling ashes, only served to deepen the living green. Then, this is neither more nor less than a miracle, and like Moses, who watched the scene with strange and wondering awe, we too will turn aside and see this great sight!

“The angel of the Lord appeared to him out

of the midst of the bush." Brethren, I desire and pray that you and I may see and hear the same celestial messenger, as we stand and gaze at the blazing wonder here to-day. "Messenger!" yes, that they tell us is the meaning of the word "Angel." Moses saw, and you shall see, if you will, the messenger of the Lord. But what messenger? The Lord hath many such, who, on rapid foot and swifter wing, are sent of Him to tell His messages and do His will. Listen—"I am the Lord thy God." Does the angel say that? Is he a messenger? Is he sent upon this mission; and at the same time is he the Lord who sends? Then Moses may well draw off his shoes and stand worshipful and awe-stricken on such holy ground. For who can this be but the Messiah—God, yet sent of God? It is a vision of Jesus Christ. Yes, He is the wonder of wonders, the divinely human mystery of the Bush!

Jesus! He is man, poor mean flesh and blood; so low did He stoop, so small did He become! A bush! A root out of a dry ground. But the poor mean human has the Divine in it. The frail mean casket of clay has God in it! The bush burns, vivid with Divine celestial fire! We cannot solve this mystery, we cannot touch it; a bush charged, compassed, all-possessed by fire; yet unharmed, uninjured, unchanged, unconsumed! Godhead and manhood, Deity and dust,

interfused, combined, made one—the man Christ Jesus! Infidelity scoffs at it, science denies it, its mystery is their stumblingblock. But to you and me, dear friends, its mystery is its evidence; it passeth knowledge, as the Divine for ever must do; the gauge, and grasp, and grandeur of it can only be within the power and intellect of a God!

Look again at the bush! Not only the person of Christ is seen in it, but the sufferings of Christ. The bush is His humanity. Oh, the fire of trial and pain, through all His earthly life, whose agonies He endured for you and me! On Him, our substitute, fell all the bitter stripes of our just punishment for sin. Against Him all the assaults of hell's malignity were concentrated, hot, and fell, and fierce.

On Him were poured out all the fiery vials of human malice, hate and scorn! No human tongue can tell, no human mind can conceive, the keen anguish that scorched and pierced His human soul.

“Oh, never, never canst thou know,  
What then for thee thy Saviour bore;  
The fire of that mysterious woe,  
The pain, the grief, the anguish sore”—

culminating at last in the heart-breaking cry,  
“My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken  
Me?” “Behold, the bush burned with fire!”

But the bush was not consumed. Sustained, strengthened, made proof by the indwelling God-head, the fire spent its awful strength in vain. It could not curse what God had not cursed; it could not harm what God had sworn to keep. In Him was no sin; on Him was no scar. Every blow recoiled on those who smote Him. His foes were trampled underneath His feet. In the very midst of the burning fiery furnace, He uttered the shout of victory, "It is finished!" and then through the iron gate which opened to Him of its own accord, He came forth from the furnace—as if the smell of fire had not passed on Him—unharméd, unsinged, even to one solitary hair.

"Love's redeeming work is done:  
Fought the fight, the battle won;  
Fierce the fire through which He pass'd;  
Forth, unharméd, He comes at last!  
Love's mysterious work is done,  
Jesus hath the victory won!"

"The bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed." But our blessed Saviour declared that His own experiences were to be reproduced in the experiences of the Church, whose foundations were builded on His blood. See in the burning bush, then, a lively image of the Christian Church. Like it the Church's place is in the wilderness, a desert even more inhospitable and barren than Midianitish wilds.

As in the bush, so in the Church, there is the presence and the voice of the living God. As in the bush, so in the Church, there has been the burning of the fire. All that human rage and passion, all that devilish madness and malignity could devise in the way of pains, penalties, and persecutions have been poured, like the blast of a sevenfold furnace, upon the Church of God.

From the hour when its Head and Lord was crucified, from the days when Herod vexed it, and killed James, the brother of John, with the sword, right down the ages to the martyrs of Madagascar, or the confessors who were killed and eaten but yesterday in the South Pacific, the Church has been subjected to the furious flames, the red-hot coals of human wrath. It has been cast into prison dungeons dark and horrible; it has swung on the gallows, it has been burned at the stake, whelmed in the flood, torn on the rack, made to bleed under the axe, the knife, the guillotine and sword. The resources of science, the keenest wit of man and subtlety of devil have been exhausted in devising and applying new tortures for the sake of producing acuter agonies. I tell you earth, and sea, and sky have been lighted with the lurid flames in which the Church has been enwrapped! "The bush burned with fire."



“But the bush was not consumed!” Since the day our Lord gave the Twelve the wide commission to go “forth into all the world,” the Church of God, the true and living Church of faithful souls was never so numerous, never so powerful, never so prosperous, as she is to-day. That is all that persecution and fire have been able to accomplish. Right round the world, this Church of Christ, this bush in the desert, which has undergone very hell flames of suffering, is lifting her fair countenance above the eyes of men, and spreading her hands in merciful benediction on those who fired the faggots and blew up the flames which were to consume her into dust! This Book, do you see it? Not a leaf, not a word, not a letter of it, but has been burned ten thousand times—on parchment, papyrus, and paper; in many a language and many a land it has fed the furnace and lit the fire. It has been piled by thousands and thousands at a time in huge bonfires, and offered amid the yells of triumphant crowds, a holocaust to gods of wood and to the triple-crowned idol of the papal throne! “The bush has burned with fire.” “But the bush was not consumed.” This Book is ubiquitous; never a land under heaven that has it not, never a language among men that does not contain it. By millions upon millions it pours forth in new and rushing

streams every year. In this land, in which it has been banned and burned times out of count, a new translation of it has just been so hotly and hungrily demanded, that the presses were paralysed in their vain endeavours to supply the market. Paganism, I tell you, has had it trampled into dirt by beasts; Popery has burnt it at the hands of the common hangman; sceptical science has branded and seared it as with hot iron; infidelity has torn it into shreds; and Atheism, of the modern type, has besmeared its pages with mud and filth whose fumes are insupportable—but the bush is not consumed! Heaven and earth may pass away; these shall burn and be consumed; the sky shall shrivel as a parchment scroll; the stars shall fall like untimely figs; the sun, wrapt in sackcloth, shall give light no more; the earth is to become ashes in the general fire; but the Word of the Lord, asbestos-like, will defy the fire—not one jot or tittle of this Word shall fail!

Lo! the bush burned with fire. But the blessed Saviour declares that the servant shall be as his “Lord.” What has been done to Him in the world, He says, shall be done to you also, Christian believer. Then the burning bush is a lively image of the Christian too. He, too, dwells in the desert, a wilderness country, a very Midian indeed; and he, too, is subject to

the fire. On examining the page of Holy Writ, it is quite wonderful how often the trials and sorrows of the Christian are figured forth by fire. "Wickedness burneth as a fire;" "thou shalt pass through the fire;" affliction is called a "refiner's fire;" the slanderous tongue is a "fire;" temptations are called "fiery darts," and persecutions "fiery trials;" sorrows and pain are the "furnace of affliction." These expressions, and many others of the same kind, intimate how the Christian, like the bush, burns with fire. Jacob said, "All these things are against me;" Job said, "My soul desires strangling rather than life;" David cried aloud for help, or wrung his hands in despair for Absalom; Paul, when he pleaded for the extraction of the thorn that pierced him; you, my friends, when you have sighed and wept under some great trouble, and know how painful it is when the bush burns with fire.

"Thus in God's furnace are His children tried;  
But how can they the fiery test abide?"

They can and do. The bush is burned with fire, but the bush is not consumed. Jacob's white head bends in grateful praise; Job comes to honour, wealth, and happiness again; David resumes his harp and lifts his song anew; Paul laughs at the "light affliction," and takes the

righteous crown ; and you, my friend, have wiped yesterday's tears away, and have built an Ebenezer stone, having safely crossed that last rough and stony mile. Thank God, the Christian is invincible !

“ Fire cannot burn, and floods cannot drown,  
The soul that the Saviour doth take for His own.”

“ To Him mine eye of faith I turn,  
And through the fire pursue my way ;  
The fire forgets its power to burn,  
The lambent flames around me play ;  
His arms are still my sure defence,  
Nor earth nor hell shall pluck me thence.

Though in affliction's furnace tried,  
Unhurt on snares and death I'll tread ;  
Though care assail, and hell thrown wide,  
Pour all its flames upon my head,—  
Like Moses' bush, I'll mount the higher,  
And flourish unconsumed in fire !”

Now I desire to leave one final thought with you. Why did not the fire burn the bush ? Because the Lord was in it. He had made it His temporary dwelling-place. Why did not the fire burn the Christ ? Through wrath and rage of man and devil, through cross, and death, and hell, He passed unscathed. Why ? Because of the Divine in Him. Because the bush of that clay temple of humanity was the tabernacle in which dwelt the Deity. Why has not the fierce, horrible, and perpetual fires of persecution and testing succeeded in destroying the Christian

Church? Because God is in it. In it the tabernacle of God is with men. Christ walks amid the golden candlesticks; the Father dwells where His name is recorded, and the very life-breath of the Church is the living Spirit of God. Do you perceive my message now? Do you infer my lesson? Oh, Christian, be filled with the Holy Ghost. Be sure you have Christ in you, the hope of glory. Be the temples of God. So shall you be kept faithful, strong, and safe. So shall you vanquish every foe, quench every fire; and, delivered out of every test and trial, shall take your place at last among the immortal ranks around the throne of God!

## XXI.

“ *WILD GRAPES.* ”

“ He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.”—ISA. v. 2.

THIS striking parable brings before us an attractive scene, common enough in Israel’s palmy days. On a green hill-slope, on which fall the earliest rays of the morning sun, a number of wide-spreading vine-trees grow. Tastefully trellised and carefully trained, the extended branches, laden with green foliage, through which the purple bunches here and there are showing, show that the vineyard is well cultivated, beautifully kept. On one of the terraces stands a lodge, the dwelling of the vine-tender, the residence of the watcher. Down on a lower terrace is fixed the spacious tank or press, into which the juicy grapes are cast, to be pressed or trodden by the feet of merry youth, who will sing at their toil, while the musical ripple of the purple juice into the wine-vat helps their time and tune. Around the whole a strong thorn fence, and then a high

stone wall, throw their protecting arms. The passer-by admires the scene. "Capital vineyard," quoth he, "and well kept."

But the passer-by returns that way again before long, and lo! a change has come over the scene—a change most lamentable! The wall is broken down. Rough heaps of stones here and there are all that is left to tell him what it was. The hedge is full of huge gaps; part of it stubbed up; and the rest, ragged, matted with cumbersome creepers and straggling parasites. The vines are shattered, torn, sprawling on the earth, half hidden by the sour, rank grass and weeds which run riot over all the ruined ground. Here, the vine is dead; there, it is dying; and everywhere it is left to perish uncared for, disowned. The soil is rough with thorns and hard for the want of the spade; the terraces are broken and shapeless. The whole ruin is the lair of the wild boar, the den of the fox, the haunt of the snake. The lodge is a fallen mass of crumbling masonry, the wine-vats are stagnant mud-ponds, the habitation of the lizard and other reptiles. Desolation and ruin are written everywhere!

That is the picture, the double picture, sketched for our instruction by the pencil of inspiration. Look on that picture, and then on this. Why is this sad lapse? What has wrought the melan-

choly change ? How has this sad state of things been brought about ? Hark you ! The vineyard disappointed the reasonable hopes of the husbandman. It brought forth no sweet and profitable fruit. It produced an abundance of noxious, useless berries—wild grapes, bitter, baneful—and that was all ! It became a curse, you see, and not a blessing—a loss, not a gain—an evil, not a good. And so sentence went forth against it ; the garden became a desert ; the vineyard is a wilderness ; and there the ruin lies, a warning to nations, Churches, cities, and men !

This parable is of God's own telling, and He forthwith applies it to Himself and the Jewish nation. The "*very fruitful hill*" was none other than the Land of Canaan—a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the joy, it was called, of the whole earth. This "*choicest vine*" was the chosen seed of Abraham, selected out of all the world beside to be the Lord's peculiar people. This "*hedging round*" was the conquest of their enemies, the massing them together as a free, favoured, and separate race. He became Himself their hedge and wall, their protector and defence. This "*gathering out the stones*" was their deliverance from idolatry, superstition, slavery, all that would hinder their moral growth. This "*building of the tower*"



was His own presence among them, the rearing of His tabernacle, the erection of His temple, making the land in special fashion His dwelling-place. This "*digging of the winepress*" was the altar of sacrifice and gift, the law of morals and ritual, the sacred service of duty and praise, the holy works of righteousness and truth. All this was done by Him on their behalf. Divine wisdom, power, and love spent their treasures on this highly-favoured plot of ground. "*What more,*" says the Divine Husbandman, "*could I have done to my vineyard that I have not done?*"

But when He looked for grapes, the natural outflow of gratitude and loyalty, truth and love, it brought forth wild grapes!—rebellion, ingratitude, idolatry, sensuality and crime. The history of the Jewish people tells on every page the story of their shame, and endorses the terrible charge here brought against them. Hence the Lord casts them off, the Husbandman abandons the vineyard, takes away the hedge of His protection, and leaves them to the consequences of their sin. The ruinous result you know. The Jewish nation was broken, trampled on, suffered nameless horrors at the hands of heathen enemies; its people were hurled from their place, scattered by the winds of war and the tempests of persecution; the once fertile

land has been smitten with a curse of barrenness; the terrible heel of the remorseless Turk is grinding the remnant in the dust, and the land is given over to mourning and lamentation and woe! Verily there is a God that judgeth the earth!

The history of the Jewish nation is written for our warning, and the lessons taught by this parable are sadly needed by the England of to-day. There is not one word of this description of the vineyard at its best which is not true of this highly-favoured land of ours. This, too, is a very fruitful hill. Under the soil, what unheard-of mineral riches, mines of wealth! Above the soil and in it what fertility, what productive power! Around us, from port and bay and harbour, our merchant fleets take and fetch and gather the riches of the earth! Here, too, is planted a chosen and favoured vine. Here God has planted the Anglo-Saxon race, so blended with some other tribal blood that, even our enemies being judges, we have been unequalled in hardy daring, conquering energy, splendid enterprise, and universal stretch of power. We, too, have been strangely "*fenced in*" by the Providence of God. Our iron coasts, compassed by the inviolate sea, hath largely made and kept us separate and safe. Out of this land have also been gathered the stones of idolatry, barbarism,

despotism, bigotry, slavery. Here, too, the Husbandman hath built His tower and made His wine-press. "The temples of His grace, how beautiful they stand!"—the dwelling-place of God; while the channels for holy deeds, altars for holy praise and sacrifice, space for loving charities, and grateful work for God and men, are around us on every hand. Surely the Lord hath not dealt so with any people!

To *us* He says, as well as to Israel of old, "What more could I do to My vineyard that I have not done? Why, then, when I looked for grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

Is not this indictment true? No true patriot, much less Christian, can look without grave anxiety on the tastes and tendencies of the times in which we live. Wild grapes, offensive to God, mischievous to others, and ruinous to us, are being produced on every hand. The Husbandman describes some of them.

*The excessive greed of gain.* "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." The sin lies not in the mere addition of house to house, by fair and lawful means, or a moderate gathering together of earthly good; but in that mad rush and scramble, that strife and struggle to lay hold of all the hand can grasp, of all the

arms can hold. Never was Nebuchadnezzar's golden god worshipped with half the eager frenzy of to-day. Utterly reckless of Naboth's honest claim to his little vineyard—regardless of the right of poorer neighbours to gain a livelihood, a powerful purse shall buy them out; huge estates shall be enclosed in an ever-expanding ring fence; rampant speculators shall starve the spinner and the weaver by the cunning of a "cotton corner;" strong combinations and long purses shall build gigantic warehouses, and like the hideous monsters of the deep, shall spread their sinuous tentacles and gather all the trade of every kind into their hungry maw, and smite a whole street into commercial paralysis, that their devilish monopoly may swell their hoard of gold. This horse-leech avarice, this selfish craving for everything and all, this elbowing and thrusting out of their dishonest path to gain, is being continued "until there is no place," and an avaricious monopoly places them alone in the midst of the earth. I dare to say it is a moral wrong; I dare to say it is a national calamity; I dare to say it is a wild grape which wins a "woe" from God. The one gleam of hope lies in the fact that the monster will be its own destroyer. "Of a truth, many such houses, great and fair, shall be without inhabitant." Here, then, is one of the wild

grapes of our times—a reckless greed of gain, an oppressive selfishness that tramples under foot the claims of brotherhood and the rights of men.

Another wild grape is *the crying sin of intemperance*. “Woe unto them that rise up early to follow strong drink, that continue until night, till wine inflame them.” However men may differ as to the right or wrong of the use of alcohol at all, there can be no question anywhere that the prevalence of drunkenness is a scandal, a calamity, and a shame. I can but mourn, and sorely, that its license is practically unlimited, and that legislation aids and nourishes the evil traffic which sows pain and poverty broadcast, and swells so fearfully our national record of immorality, cruelty, and crime.

Another wild grape is *the headstrong rush after pleasure*; the follies and frivolities of the tens of thousands whose whole time and tastes and talents are wickedly laid on the shrine of sensual delights. A perpetual round of feasting, junketing, dancing, sightseeing and sensational enjoyments is the be-all and end-all of their existence. “The harp, the tabret, the pipe,” the fiddle, and the song,—the tinsel of the stage, the ballad of the music-hall, and all the pitiful buffoonery of jokes and comicalities are brought to bear to help sane men and women to play the fool.

England has quite an army of merry-andrews to provide her with what is called recreation, but which, with rare exceptions, is a compound of vice and folly enough to make the angels weep.

Another wild grape is *sensuality in its grosser and fouler shapes*. "Woe unto them which draw iniquity with cords and sin as with a cart-rope." In this case the silken threads which bound them to the gilded chariot of pleasure have been woven by the force of habit into strong cords and cables, and they are drawn by the baser passions into bestial sensuality, and within the veil of secrecy and under the curtains of night, uncleanness reigns which here shall know no name.

Another wild grape is *infidelity*. "Woe unto them that regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of His hands." They deny His creating power, they question His existence, and as for the operation of His Providence, not God, but law and nature is the cause of all! And all this in England—from the scientist's laboratory, the philosopher's study, the lecturer's desk, and the professor's chair! Again, they say, "Aha! Let God hasten His work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Lord draw nigh, that we may know it." This is a deeper depth; this is the laugh of the scoffer; this is the jeer from the seat of the scornful; this is the sneering jest of the fool

who says in his heart, "There is no God!" What! is this wildest of wild grapes grown in England, too? Yes, there are clubs whose bond is atheism, leagued men whose aim is the spread of infidelity, and, as you know, it has been elevated by an English constituency to a place in the high council of the land!

Another wild grape here mentioned is *fraud and falsehood*; and still another is *dishonesty*. "Woe to them who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter," and so on. Here is the poison of immoral fiction, the deceptions of speech, dress, appearance that make so many people a moving lie; the shams and hypocrisies, the white lies and deceptions that curse society with a dry rot, and leave it hollow,—hollow as a sepulchre with dead men's bones inside. Again, "Woe unto them which justify wickedness for reward!" Tricks of trade, scamped handiwork, adulterated goods, lying puffs and advertisements, commercial frauds, haphazard speculations—Oh, 'tis a sickening list, and may not, cannot possibly be recounted here. What Paul said of the ancient Ephesus is sadly true of modern England. It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret; and every true follower of Christ will shrink in horror from such enemies of honour, England, Christ, and truth, and say, "Oh, my soul, come not thou into their secrets,

and to their assembly, Mine honour be not thou united."

Such are some of the wild grapes referred to in this stern, plain-spoken chapter. Such are some of the elements of moral mischief which threaten the ruin of our beloved land. What shall be the end of it? Must England, like Israel, perish, forsaken of her God? Is the time approaching when her walls shall be overthrown, and her hedge be plucked up—and her vine trampled into dust? No *nation* that forgets God shall prosper: look on the ruins of Babylon, of Greece, of Israel, of Rome. No *city* that forgets God shall prosper: read the sad records of Nineveh, of Tyre, of Jerusalem, of Sardis, of Laodicea. No *man* that forgets God shall prosper: look at the graves of Pharaoh, of Ahab, of Saul, of Herod, of Napoleon. At the point where rebellion culminates, the rebels are forsaken of God, and arewhelmed in the ruin their own guilt has wrought! Shall England perish? Shall her sun, which has so long shone peerless in the political heavens, be quenched in deepest night? Our inmost heart, our every patriotic impulse, prays—"God forbid!" Thank God for the strong leaven of Gospel piety within her. Thank God for the moral salt sprinkled amid her incipient putrefaction by the faithful souls who acknowledge Jesus to be King and Lord. If England lives on, and grows



in lustre as she lives, it must be because the King Immanuel is undisputed Monarch of the national heart, uncontrolled Director of the national policy and the national will. Still, thank God, her laws are based upon the Word of God. Still her cities, towns, and hamlets ring with the worship of God. Oh that she would arise in her strength, rid herself of "strange children" who design her fall; destroy her intemperance; crush out her idolatries, her lust of pleasure, and her lust of wealth; rectify her principles of commerce and purify her trade; shape all her policy and principles by the Sermon on the Mount; then shall she still and ever lead the van in the moral progress of the world; then—

"Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them; nought shall make us rue,  
If England to itself do rest but true."

## XXII.

*"COMFORT FOR THE CAREWORN."*

"God that comforteth those that are cast down."—2 COR. vii. 6.

A NOBLE soul, this Apostle of the Gentiles. A man of a generous nature, as well as a broad intellect and a strong will. One proof of this, if proof were needed, is his keen susceptibility of joy and grief. At Ephesus he suffered greatly, "a great fight of affliction" he calls it; in Macedonia he was tortured with harassing anxieties, despondency and fears; then he is overwhelmed with gratitude and comfort, and talks of a superabounding experience of the gladness which is of the heart. I think, whatever the stoic may say, that this barometrical subjection to the depressions and upliftings in life is the sign and token of a noble nature and a big human heart. A cold, selfish man, of narrow views and no sympathies, is certainly a consistent man, and goes on the calm and even tenor of his way to perfection. There is a miserable monotony about him which is almost as refreshing and has almost

as much ozone in it as the atmosphere in this year of grace with the barometer at 30 decimal 9. But wherever there is a generous and manly soul, there is a proportionate capacity for grief and for joy. The storm and tempest cannot greatly stir the pliant sapling or the stunted shrub; cannot lash into strong commotion the narrow rivulet or the shallow pool; cannot batter an ant-hill, or disturb a mound created by a mole. But they can make the broad elm and stately oak to shake and quiver to the very root; and the wide lake, majestic river, fathoms deep, they can churn and toss into tumultuous wrath; the lifted hills, the mountain peaks, they can maul and batter in frantic rage. Such an oak, such a river, such a prominent peak among his kind was the apostle Paul, and hence extremes of joy and their antipodes of sorrow alike entered into his experience, and extorted psalms of thankfulness or monodies of sorrow according to the circumstances of the hour.

At Ephesus, as I have said, he walked knee-deep in trouble. He describes his persecution there as a "fighting with wild beasts." When he manages to escape, he finds his way into Macedonia; but although the atmosphere there was a little calmer, and the enmity against him was of a milder type, yet his heart was sad, his mind was in suspense; his anxiety about the

Churches he had planted, especially Corinth, which was giving him much trouble, harassed him exceedingly. "When we were come into Macedonia," he says, "our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side : without were fightings and within were fears." Then follows my text, "Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus."

Some old writer says, there is never a rose without a thorn, never a sky without a cloud, even though it be no bigger than a man's hand; so there is never a gladness without a "but," and never a record of enjoyment without a "nevertheless." And this is all very true. Oh, those "buts," we are used to say, they are flies in our most fragrant pot of ointment, skeletons at our rarest banquets, cloud-spots in our brightest sky. But don't you see that is a matter that will bear turning round about, only we have such a tendency to look at the sombre side that we forget the bright light that is in the cloud. Suppose we read it thus—There is no thorn with neither flower nor fruit, nor sky with neither star nor rift of blue ; so there is never a sadness without an ameliorating "but," and never a record of sorrow without a compensating "nevertheless." This latter is quite as true as the former, and whatever thing we have to carry

that has two handles, let us take hold of the easiest and the handiest, for our neighbours' sake as well as for our own. Paul has "pecks of trouble," as people say, but he says "nevertheless," and turns at once to consider the compensations he can reckon on, and to fix his eye on the patch of blue that breaks the dull monotony of his sombre sky. So you see he is an instance of the kind of experience which he says will come to all faithful souls—"Cast down, but not destroyed."

There were many things that conspired to cast Paul down. He had temporal trials of no ordinary magnitude and strength. His own race and people hated him, the heathens of Ephesus and elsewhere persecuted him so hotly that he went in peril of his life; and, worst of all, there were those in the Churches he had planted of which God had made him overseer whose conduct caused him sharp and constant pain. This latter was no doubt what he meant by saying he had fears within. Then, too, he had a grievous disappointment. Titus did not turn up until long after he was expected, and in those stormy and perilous times Paul was sick at heart for fear of the young man's safety, sick also of suspense concerning the news he had to bring. So the apostle is "cast down." He was a good man and true, a noble man and righteous,

was walking in the path of duty with his hands clean concerning men and his heart right with God ;—and yet he was "cast down." You don't think that his Lord loved him any less, or that He had withdrawn from him either guidance, protection or care. Depend upon it the sun shines, whatever be the density of the November fog ; depend upon it nature's vital machinery is moving, however tree and garden may be bare of leaf and flower ; and so, despite appearances, whatever your dim vision may fail to note, all round the year and all through your course, O Christian, be sure that God sitteth on the throne and ruleth all things well. He has but poor confidence in the captain who thinks he isn't on the ship because he can't see him on the bridge and there's a gruff old sailor at the helm.

I pray you note what distinctive name and title the apostle gives to the God he loves and serves. "God that comforteth those that are cast down." I cannot find any god that mortals worship who is at all given that way. The worshippers of Baal were cast down low enough when they couldn't make him hear, however loud they cried, however deep they cut themselves with stones. But it was cold comfort they got from him. The gilded god of money, the purple god of honour, the glittering god of show, the rosy god of pleasure, may delude their

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worshippers with fleet and fancied joys while their devotees are up and about; but I have never heard that any of them are of much use when those who offer at their lying shrines are cast down. Oh no, it's down you go, and down you stay. Neither does the character which Paul gives his God belong to the world. Men as a rule do not by any means trouble themselves much with people who are cast down. "All men will speak well of thee when thou doest well by thyself;" that is when thou art lifted up. Nothing succeeds, they say, like success. There is always a brace of pheasants, and maybe a hare into the bargain, sent to those whose preserves are stocked with game. But let a man be "cast down," and unless there's some spring left in his own muscles, he's likely to lie there until the kindly grave opens its hospitable doors and protects him from the trampling feet. Besides if the world had really the best intentions it cannot minister to a mind diseased, cannot pluck out a rooted sorrow, cannot cure the heartache, cannot grapple with a canker at the core, cannot lift or comfort the souls that are cast down.

For all this there is but one sure resource, one all-capable Physician, only one balm of consolation, only one hand and arm that can lift up those that are cast down,—God can, will, does, as many a saint in heaven can witness, as many

a trustful soul on earth can tell. He will not break a bruised reed ; though it may be so crushed and broken that it can produce no sound except a voiceless sigh or a discordant groan, He will gently handle and deftly heal until the pipe, all musical and harmonious, shall be tuned to thankful psalm and song.

Those that are "cast down." That is a very inclusive description. You and I are all tenderly gathered within the sweep of this gracious promise. He does not ask who or what we are; nor how far we are down, nor what has cast us down, nor how often we have been down and lifted up before; nor how far we deserve to lie just where we have fallen, nor whether we are likely to be cast down again. No, no, our fall, our prostration, our grief, our tears—these are our *certificate*, and if we will but present that before His gracious throne, He will stretch His mighty arm toward us, take gentle but strong hold of us with His nail-pierced hand, and lift us up and comfort us, and set us in a wealthy place. My friends, I pray you, believe this, whatever else may fail, the consolations of religion will abide with you, and the comforts of God will refresh your soul. Not more fair are the golden-eyed daisies that gleam in meadow grass; not more bright are the stars that stud the midnight sky, not more sparkling are the dewdrops that im-



pearl the grove on an autumn morn ; not more golden are the shafts of sunlight from the west that flicker on a summer sea,—not more fair, more bright, more sparkling, more golden, and scarce more numerous than the rich promises of comfort that besprinkle the Holy Book. “Be of good comfort : rise, He calleth thee.” “Walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” “Blessed be the God of all comfort.” “Thou shalt comfort me on every side.” “The Lord shall comfort Zion.” “Thou, Lord, hast comforted me.” When life is past, and comfort in life is needed no more, even in the valley of death it will follow us,—“Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.” Every messenger of the Gospel grace is commissioned to distribute and declare it,—“Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.” Our blessed Lord Himself, it is declared, came from heaven on this special mission—“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me ; He hath sent Me to comfort all that mourn.” He hath commanded every Christian to drop the balsam of this promise on the sad heart of his neighbour,—“Wherefore comfort one another with these words,”—and as if this were not enough, He reveals and sends the Holy Ghost in this special character, and pledges Him to a perpetual residence among us. “The Father shall give you another Comforter that He may abide with you

for ever." And, in conclusion, the Father Himself speaks to us, in big-hearted, tender, sweetly human words, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you!"

I have just one thing more to say concerning these rich and helpful words of Paul. While the comforts of God come to us by direct benedictions of His own, they also come through many a medium of blessing and many a channel of help. At times the angels have been made the messengers of His mercy, the almoners of His bounty, the comforters of His saints. I am far from saying that this ministry has ceased—I do not believe it; but rather that, all unseen but not the less really, those "ministers of His that do His pleasure" are still sent forth to "minister to them that are heirs of salvation." On errands of comfort, ravens were sent to Elijah, a little flower to Mungo Park in an African desert, a little singing-bird to Martin Luther, and the sweet tones of David's harp to the sad and moody Saul. But God hath specially ordained it that *He will comfort man by man*. So Jethro cheered the heart of Moses; so old Eli gave comfort to sad-hearted Hannah; so the dejected David's soul was strengthened by Jonathan; and here Paul was "comforted by the coming of Titus." The advent of this young man was as the rising sun on the morning clouds, and

brought light and cheer to the scarred veteran's tired and weary heart. Brethren, according to my thinking, this is one of the noblest missions of our life—to cheer the drooping, succour the needy, and to comfort the sad; to pluck the thorns from the pathway of our friends and neighbours; to plant instead the bright and fragrant flowers; to dry their tears and lift their vision, so that they may see the gleaming wings of the angel Hope, filled for them with drops of healing and redolent with the glory of the Lord!

## XXIII.

*MY SERVANT JOB.*

“My servant Job.”—JOB xlii. 7.

“MY servant Job. There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil.” That is God Almighty’s own word and witness about the noble old patriarch whose record is given in this wonderful book. I want you to get a good view of this man as he was at the time when his God gave him that grand certificate of character. He was an Eastern prince of high degree. Both low and high, and rich and poor throughout the land in which he lived held him in reverence and honour. He possessed the profoundest respect and regard of all his equals; while the poor and the needy, to whom his bountiful hand was ever open, looked up to him always with gratitude and love. Wherever he went, this noble chief of graceful mien and stately presence, he was greeted with the plaudits of the rich and the blessings of the poor. He was wealthy too.

His flocks whitened the hillsides, his herds lay by thousands in the valleys, and his barns and storehouses were filled with golden grain. He was happy also in the possession of sons and daughters; and he had numerous servants, whose honest pride and delight was to obey his commands and come and go at his slightest beck and call. If I were asked to find an instance of perfect prosperity and peace, I should point to the white tents of this great, good man, as they whiten some bright and happy valley of the glowing East, and say—"It's there!"

And you and I and all the world would agree that that is as things should be—that virtue should be so rewarded, that goodness ought to be so favoured, that merit should be so acknowledged, and that bountiful kindness should be so blessed. "He richly deserves it all," we should say; "may he have good health and long life to enjoy it."

"The good should have the pleasures,  
And the bad should have the pain :  
Let the wicked have the losses,  
And the godly get the gain."

But at the point of time in Job's experience when the words of my text were spoken, all this picture of peace, plenty, and prosperity had vanished like a dream; all his glory had departed, and in its place had come a gloom that

turned all his day to night—night! thick with darkness and black with storm!

Come and look at the gaunt, hollow-eyed patriarch in his misery, if indeed you can endure the ghastly sight. There he sits among the ashes, with ashes on his brow. His shrivelled limbs are covered with sackcloth; his sorrowful face is disfigured by disease; and his pitiful groans and wailings cease not, night or day. The whole of his possessions have gone from him at the hands of robber hordes and fierce marauders, and his poverty is as great as any wayside beggar to whom his servants had ever given a loaf of bread; and to fill up his cup of bitterness to the brim, all his children are dead—crushed into the grave at one fell swoop. If I were asked to point out an instance of the most complete human distress and misery, I should point to this emaciated mortal groaning among the potsherds, and say—"It's there!"

Now comes the problem—the mystery—the unexampled riddle. Why this sudden, this awful change? Morally, spiritually, religiously, this man is just what he was before. His hands are as clean, his lips are as pure, his heart is as right, and his whole moral manhood is as good and noble as when his home was full of happiness, his barns were filled with plenty, his quiver was full of children, and his bow abode in

strength. His circumstances had undergone a woful change ; his character was as fair as the sun, as good as gold, and as transparent as the dewdrops all the time.

The three friends of Job, who, with all their faults, were faithful in his adversity, vainly tried to account for it on the score of his own ill-doings and moral defects. Job was able to show a clean bill of moral health, and their undeserved upbraidings and unfounded charges were scattered, by the brightness of his life, into thin air. He victoriously repels all their charges and insinuations, and declares, in noble words that you and I will do well to take to heart, remembering the troubled soul and blistered lips out of which they come : "Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let go !"

When the three men were silenced, and while the afflicted patriarch was vainly crying for the light, a young man called Elihu joins in the conversation, and respectfully shows them his opinion. And a very wise and sensible opinion it is, and may be summed up in three or four sentences from his own speech. "Should it be according to thy mind ?" "God giveth not account of any of His matters." "Far be it from God to do wickedly." "God is greater than man." That, my dear friends, as far as I can

understand it, is the only answer that can be given to all who, like the patriarch, are tempted to call in question the dealings of Divine Providence, either with nations, communities, families, or men. "God is greater than men." "He giveth not account of any of His matters." "His matters!" What can poor, short-sighted, insignificant capabilities as ours have to do with "His matters?" "His matters" include the whole universe—moral, mental, material, mortal, and angelic; and all these, in the comprehensive scope of His all-perfect rule, are interlinked and interlaced, and their interests are so interwoven that the interest of one is in the interest of all! "His matters" are infinite and eternal matters. How can He give account of them to man? How can the finite have the infinite made simple? He who can comprehend an infinite plan, and grasp all the machinery that is working out an infinitely perfect purpose, must himself be infinite.

You cannot pour the ocean into a pond. You cannot crowd the light of the sun into a glow-worm's tiny lamp. You cannot compress the mind of an archangel into the intellect of a schoolboy; and you might more reasonably try to do this than to understand "His matters," whose mind is infinite and eternal, whose monarchy is absolute and universal, whose methods



are the perfection of wisdom, and whose measures deal with all things—from Gabriel the Archangel to the tiniest insect that feels the summer sun. “God is greater than men.” That’s the answer to those who fling out their perpetual “Why? Why? Why?” when the workings of His Providence run counter to their wishes and opposite to their opinions and desires. There is an old proverb to the effect that “fools and children should not see half-finished work;” and if that is true concerning man’s poor, limited designs, how much more true must it be of “His matters,” which require all the ages of time to complete and perfect them for the glorious morning when the Divine scheme of providence and grace which is now working out shall be completed, and all the morning stars shall shout aloud for joy!

But although we cannot understand His matters; though, from the very nature of things, He must work far beyond our poor skill to trace Him—must work in the very majesty of mystery—must move on a plane infinitely higher than our insect scope can reach—He hath revealed enough of Himself and of His doings, and more than enough, to show us that trust in His providence, loyalty to His rule, and hope in His Word is gloriously certain to result in our safety and security, our sustentation and deliverance,

our ultimate prosperity and peace. I read all this in the three brief words of my text—"My servant Job." However vast His government, however high and independent in His proceedings, however He may wrap Himself in mystery, however awful He may be in the majesty of His power, He graciously knows and notes, and watches the individual man, calls him even by his name—"My servant Job." He marks his character, and owns the good and true in tender claim of possession, honour, and love. "My servant—*Mine!*" As if He had said, "He belongs to Me; I have him, I hold him; I delight in him, and will never let him go. My servant! I perceive his loyalty, I accept his works, I approve his conduct, I employ him to work out My will, I appoint him to the post of peril and of pain, but it is the post of honour, and I will pay him his wages, and I will mete out to him his reward."

"My servant Job." Mark you! He calls him by that name in the days of his wealth and prosperity. Riches and grace can go together; secular success and piety can go hand in hand; and a prince among men may be more princely still as the servant of God. There is a great deal said in the Book about the peril of riches, the dangers of prosperity, and the hard work men have to be very wealthy and godly at the

same time. But nowhere is it said that money need to hinder, that secular prosperity need to prevent, or that social rank and position need to deprive anybody of being that grandest, greatest, and best thing in the world—a loved and trusted servant of God.

“My servant Job.” You notice that his God calls him by that name before ever the days of testing, trial, and calamity came upon him. What God looked at was the heart, the life, and the motive; and Job was good and true in the days when all went well with him. I have met with good Christians who, when they have read of martyrs and confessors who have glorified God in the fire, of noble saints and holy heroes who have borne the most crushing crosses with positive rapture and delight—when they have seen and known some of God’s best and brightest suffer in the fiery furnace before their eyes, have been led to compare with that their own still waters, and green pastures, and smoothly, restful course, and have doubted whether they could be the chosen of God. But in the long and happy days when the patriarch had all that heart could wish, and life ran calmly as a summer stream, his God acknowledged him as “My servant Job.”

“My servant Job.” You will find that this expression is used by the Almighty at the end

of the book as well as at the beginning; and what was Job's condition then? As poor as poverty could make him, as sad as misery could distress him, as ill and feeble as sickness could afflict him, as childless and alone as death could bereave him—the very victim of mortal grief and sorrow; and yet, in spite of the sackcloth and the ashes, the moral crown is still upon his brow, and there flashes on his forehead, like a star, the splendid title, “My servant Job.” Take heart of grace, oh thou afflicted, tossed with a tempest!

“My servant Job.” Just before this was said, Job had uttered hard things of his God—of His government, of His dealings with himself. He had kicked against the pricks, had charged God with forgetting him, with vengefulness, and cruelty, and injustice; and had entertained thoughts even of suicide. Even when God came to speak to him he was sullen under a sense of wrong. And yet, in spite of all his faults, infirmities, and sin, the Lord lays His hand lovingly on his bended head, and fondly owns him, in the presence of his three friends, as “My servant Job.” Oh, my brethren, you and I, poor faulty ones, may well say, “Thank God for this!”

“My servant Job.” Need I tell you that his latter end was better than the beginning?

He was richer, happier, more prosperous than ever, and still to God he was, "My servant Job." Need I tell you that after death, and through the ages, the good man has been growing richer, happier, and more prosperous still? How much he is worth, and how much happier he is to-day, I cannot tell. But this I know—that his chiefest joy, his ripest honour, his crowning glory, is to bend before the Throne and hear his God and King acknowledge him as "My servant Job."

## XXIV.

*THE MASTER'S CALL.*

"The Master is come, and calleth for thee."—JOHN xi. 28.

IN the village of Bethany dwelt Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. These three were favoured with the special friendship and love of Jesus. To Him their house was a home, a quiet resting-place, in the which, toil-worn and weary with holy labour, and sick at heart with the contradiction of sinners against Himself, He found comfort and solace, and such precious cheer as comes from tender and sympathetic hearts. Of all the places outside Gethsemane, Calvary, and the garden of the sepulchre, this friendly hearth at Bethany, with its familiar and holy Guest, seems to me to be the sweetest, holiest, and, from a human point of view, the most attractive spot. We get a few glimpses into this bright interior—as that where Martha is busy preparing the Master an evening meal, and Mary, too rapt in His delightful company to help her sister, sits low and listening at the Saviour's

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feet. This chapter reveals to us a home-scene of another and a sadder sort. Death, who passes nobody's door, gentle or simple, not even the door which opens to make a welcome guest of Jesus, had entered the home at Bethany; and when he went away again, Lazarus was carried out for burial, followed by two weeping sisters with a weight like lead upon their hearts.

Returning from the brink of the open grave in which their loved and lost was placed, they sat among the sombre shadows of bereavement, by the hearth from which the light had gone; in the home rendered doubly sad and desolate by the long and weary absence of their Friend, the Prophet of Nazareth. Had He come at all before the blow had fallen He could have warded it aside; and, had He come just after, could have soothed and comforted their sore hearts better than all the world beside.

But He did not come—did not even send; and for three sad days, and still more sorrowful nights, He permitted them to wait and suffer, and made no sign. Many a sorrowing believer, oppressed by danger, doubt, and death, has had the same experience. They have said, "If Jesus had been with me, this had not come upon me." They have said—wearied with waiting for the music of His voice and the love-light in His eye—"My Lord delayeth His coming. How long,

O Lord? How long?" But in their case, as in that of the weeping sisters, He is not there, simply for *their* sakes—to the intent that they might believe, and that faith might win them a richer, deeper, and more lasting blessing than could ever come by sight.

On the fourth day, however, Jesus approaches the house of mourning, knowing, you see, exactly when His coming would prove best and happiest for all. No sooner does Martha get witting of His approach than, regardless of funereal custom and the restraining bonds of usage, she meets the Saviour in the outskirts of the village, and pours her full heart out to Him, in company with her tears. How He distilled the balm into her soul, led her out of the dark shadow-land of doubt, and evoked the firm and faithful cry of hope and trust—"I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God"—I may not stay to tell. It was a splendid triumph of faith over feeling. "*I believe!*"—though her dead brother lay in the cruel grave, and Jesus had stayed away! She left her Lord in the lane—left Him with that strong trust lying warm and vital against her chilled heart—to seek her sister. There she sat alone, in the silent and shaded chamber, holding commune with the dead, and sadly wondering, may be, that there was no news of Him whose tender voice she yearned most of all



to hear. Entering quietly, bending silently, the good news quivering on her tongue-tip, Martha whispered in her sister's ear one of the sweetest sentences that ever left human lips—"The Master is come, and calleth for thee." As soon as she heard that, she rose up quickly, and, smiling through her tears, slid softly from the room and from the house. "Poor woman," said the neighbours, "she goes to weep by her brother's grave." But she was on a better and brighter errand. In a few brief moments she entered the secluded lane, where Jesus still waited for her coming, and in that sweet solitude held converse with her Friend until her sad spirit felt the balsam, too, and recovered faith and hope gave good cheer to her drooping heart.

Such, my dear friends, is the beautiful setting in which the sentence I have read is placed like a pearl of price. It is a precious gem, with a lustre so bright, and burning with so Divine a glow, that we may look on it awhile apart from its setting, and read in the light of it lessons for our conscience and our life. I had planned to-night to take you back to olden times and olden scenes. But when I read the words on our communion ticket for this service, I feel that there was a message in it for *me*, a message in it for my people, a message in it for you all! The words were chosen twelve months ago, in the

privacy of my study. To-day they meet my eyes again ; they flash before me with the directness of a telegram ; they charge me with a holy errand to the Church ; they compel me to shout them in your ears. I dare not do other than take this text. May God grant it may fall upon your heart with the force, the power, with which it has fallen upon mine. "The Master is come, and calleth for thee !"

"THE MASTER !" Among all the names given to our blessed Redeemer, is there one more suggestive, more encouraging, more instructive, more full of warning than this ? Christian, the Saviour is thy MASTER ! Thou art His servant, though not His slave. On thee He lays His commands ; to thee He gives His orders ; for thee He appoints thy work. "Keep My commandments !" "Obey My will !" "Fight My battles !" "Go, work in My vineyard !" To every one, according to his several ability, He distributes His talents, and, with the authority of a Master, He says, "Occupy till I come !" Where art thou ? Art thou sleeping at thy post ? Art thou a laggard in the field ? Art thou lazily reclining under the hedge-row because the sun is hot ? Art thou stealing the Master's time, using the Master's tools, eating the Master's meat, to follow thine own devices, to do thine own chores, to perform thine own selfish and profitless designs ? Rouse thee, rouse

thee, moral idler, spiritual sluggard ! The Master cometh and calleth for thee ! Elijah ! where art thou ? Tired, despondent, faint of heart, liest thou under the juniper tree, while Jezebel plays havoc with the altar and the temple, while Ahab tramples on the laws of God, while the people perish and the priests of Baal blaspheme ? Jonah ! where art thou ? Sailing away to safe and easy quarters down Tarshish way, while over Nineveh, unwarned and unknowing, the cloud is gathering and the damning fire trembles in its heart ? Back to thy post, Elijah ! Turn thy face to Nineveh, Jonah ! Come out from thy hiding-place, thy easy-chair, thy listless dreams, thy dishonest idleness, O lazy Christian. The work is flagging ; willing reapers are baffled by their fewness in the face of so great a harvest ; men are dying ; women are suffering ; children are weeping ; souls are perishing ! Rouse thee ! Rouse thee ! The Master is come, and calleth for thee !

“THE MASTER !” Oh, workers in His vineyard, ye are few, but faithful ; and the Master pays the wages. In His service there is great reward. There *is*—do you hear ? Not “there shall be.” He gives the golden coin of grace in daily bounty ; He drops His rewards into the lap, and pays all charges, while the work goes on ! You need never be afraid of drawing subsistence-money while the spade is in your hand

and the sweat is on your brow ; and when your Saturday night comes round, when reckoning day and settling time arrives, the wages of His servants, the rich reward of all His faithful ones, will take a whole eternity to spend !

“THE MASTER!” That conveys another lesson of encouragement. Oh, comrades in His service, do you fight His battles ? Then remember that He is the Master of your enemies as well as of you, and will make them lick the dust. Their weapons may be dipped in hell ; they may be armed to the teeth ; their name may be legion ; their onslaught may be desperate ; but He is “the Master”—their Master—and, in the long run, they are bound to fall or flee ! Do you turn the furrow and sow the seed ? He is the Master of the soil ; and though it may be hard as adamant, it must yield before the ploughshare He hath forged and tempered, and under the hand of the servant He hath sent to plough. He is the Master of the seasons ; and suns must nourish and rain must fertilise the field which He hath blessed. He is the Master of the *seed* ; and it will germinate, will sprout, will prosper, even in droughty weather and under sunless skies. First the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, must wave and ripen at the Master’s will. Grip thy sword ; put thy hand to the plough ; drop in the seed. It is certain

of success; for the Master is come, and calleth for thee!

**"THE MASTER!"** Sinner! hath the word no message for thine ear? Backslider! unbeliever! scoffer! blasphemer! cold formalist! grovelling worldling! lover of pleasure! young or old! He is your Master. You cannot help it. You cannot throw off the yoke! You cannot resist His ultimate authority! He will put a hook in the nose of the rebel; He will silence the tongue of the gainsayer; and the unprofitable servant shall feel the weight of His just indignation in outer darkness and with gnashing of teeth! Don't you be fooled with the lie that blasted Eden, and sent the first human sinners into banishment and grief. Don't suffer yourselves to be cheated by a cunning devil and the sophistries of men. They are hardy enough to give God the lie! "Ye shall not surely die." I tell you the Master could not be a Master had He no law to govern with, and no justice to punish the reckless sinner that brings His law to shame. I will not reduce the government of God to an absurdity. I will not emasculate the Ten Commandments, and reduce them to the paltry dimensions of a Permissive Bill. "He that knoweth the Master's will and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes." The Master said it Himself. None but a fool will speculate

either as to the number of the stripes or the force of the stroke. Keep from under the whip, sinner! And to save thee from that, "the Master cometh, cometh in mercy, and calleth FOR THEE!" "The Master!"

"THE MASTER!" Let the servants of Christ hear the Royal word. You have your cares and your trials; you have your hindrances and enemies; you have your burdens, sorrows, and afflictions; you have your temptations and snares: but none of them are independent forces—none of them have uncontrolled and despotic power; they cannot do as they like. There is a Power that none and nothing can withstand. Jesus is *their* Master, and can restrain, control, and silence them, even as He quashed to calm the heaving wave, and hushed the raging of the wind and sea. He is Master of the elements; He is the Master of human passions; He is the Master of tempting devils; He is the Master of adverse circumstances; He is the Master of all the evil that is in us; He is the Master of the world, of all doors shut or open, to swing them as He chooses; and He hath the keys of hell and death! O, faint of heart, pluck up thy courage! O, doubting soul, take firm hold on Him! O, drooping one, shake off thy fears!

"Who can before my Master stand?  
Who is so great a King as mine?"

High over all is Thy command,  
And might and majesty are thine !”

Go to Him in every grief, for in every time of need “the Master is come, and calleth for thee !”

“THE MASTER IS COME !” He is come in His incarnation ! What a coming was that ! He is come from heaven ; come to earth ; come from His glory to a manger—from His throne to the cross ! What for ? “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus *is come* into the world TO SAVE SINNERS !” To save sinners ! For this He came ; for this He wept, and prayed, and suffered both moral and physical agony without a name ! For this He DIED !

“Behold the Saviour of mankind  
Nailed to the shameful tree !  
How vast the love that Him inclined  
To bleed and die for me !”

“THE MASTER COMETH !” He cometh in the means of grace, in the services of the sanctuary, into the midst of assembled worshippers. “Where they are gathered together,” He says, “there am I.” So hath He come to this house. In the far-off olden days He came and filled this house with His glory, and His train also filled the temple. Then rapt worshippers heard the sound of His radiant feet, and felt the touch of

His glorious garment, and a shout was heard of "a King in the camp!" Many a time since then the Lord hath visited His people. It is so yet: but how faint the tokens! How dim the revelation! How straitened and restrained His working, because of our unbelief! Surely the promise still is ours—"Behold, I come quickly! Even so, Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

"O come, O come, Immanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel!  
We mourn in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! rejoice! Immanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!"

"THE MASTER COMETH!" He comes by the strivings, wooings, movings of His Holy Spirit: now like a rushing mighty wind; now like the breathings of the evening balm; now like the sound of many waters; now like the still small voice that fell on Elijah's ear. So coming, the Master brings conviction to the sinner, pardon to the contrite, peace to the troubled, grace and comfort to the saint. Men and brethren, this is what we want. The four winds of heaven to breathe on these dry bones; the tongues of flame to warm our heart and loose our tongue; the plentiful rain to refresh the Lord's inheritance; the noonday light that floods the soul and opens heaven to the enraptured eye; the



refining fire to burnish our character and beautify our life ; the copious dew to refresh and stimulate our heart !

“Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,  
With all Thy quickening powers ;  
Come, shed abroad the Saviour’s love,  
And that shall kindle ours.”

“THE MASTER IS COME !” A pregnant sentence. He comes in every mercy that fills your cup ; comes in every trouble that disturbs your life ; comes in every privilege that invites your love. He comes in special opportunities for getting and for doing good. So He comes to us at this solemn crisis of this Church’s life. The Master is come—is come to quicken His people, to honour His sanctuary, to receive the gifts of His brethren ; to deepen the loyalty of His servants, to give us an opportunity of making a fresh and a bold, brave inroad and onslaught on the powers of darkness, and to flash more light into the darkness round about. Let every man, woman, and child respond ; for, lo ! “The Master is come, and calleth for thee !”

“THE MASTER IS COME !” That message death will shortly bring to every one of us. The awful rider on the pale horse will draw rein at every door in turn. The mystic steed has its bridle slung at some of my people’s door to-night, and the dismounted rider stands by the bedside

waiting for the striking of the hour to say—"The Master is come, and calleth for thee!" Thank God, they are ready; and, like Mary, when she heard the news, will rise up quickly and go to the place where He is. The rider will turn the reins of his pale palfrey in our own direction soon. Then how we shall wish that we had redeemed the time; that we had loved more, done more, given more, for the Master's house, the Master's cause, the Master's poor! What thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. The shadow on the dial glides on; the sands in the glass run low; the hands of the clock climb swiftly to the hour; and out yonder, in the lane of thy little Bethany, the Master is come, and calleth for thee! Then, when the fulness of the time arrives, the end of all things will come to pass; the throne will be set, and the books will be open; and among the quick and dead who shall gather there, the judgment angels shall note thy standing-place, and bring thee the message. What will thy answer be? "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."

THE MASTER IS COME, AND CALLETH FOR THEE—for thee, tired and tempted Christian, that He may comfort thee; for thee, weeping Martha, that He may dry thy tears; for thee, heart-broken Mary, that He may heal thee with His love; for thee, dead Lazarus, that He may

lift thee from the grave of moral death ; for thee, tearful and backsliding Peter, that He may forgive thy denial and restore thy peace of mind ; for thee, O young disciple, that He may carry thee in His arms or keep thee near His side ; for thee, O man or woman, busy with many cares, that He may bear thy burden and share thy toil ; for thee, thou aged one, that He may make thee meet for heaven ; for thee, idle servant, that He may expostulate with thee and bring thee to a nobler mind ; for thee, poor sinner, in thy sin and peril, to bless thee with pardon, and conduct thee to the Father's feet. He calleth for all—for every one of you. Will ye not hear ? Will ye not obey ? I implore you with tears not to reject my Saviour's love. Do not crucify the Lord again. Hark you ! "The Master is come :"—is here !—and calleth for thee.

## XXV.

*A STRANGE SIGHT.*

"We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father."—JOHN i. 14.

It is as if he had said, "Jesus of Nazareth dwelt among us, lived with us; we observed Him, His character, His works, His words and professions, very closely; and we saw clearly, convincingly, over and over again, such proofs and tokens that He was a Divine Being, we saw and heard such evidences that His flesh was the home and dwelling of the Deity, that we could not doubt it. We had proof positive. We saw His glory, the glory of God, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father, and what we saw was "full of grace and truth." It is surely a fitting time this Christmas Eve, to examine John's statement, weigh the evidence; and, if it please God, we may catch a glimpse of the glory, too.

Surely John and his comrades saw the Divinity of Jesus in the absolute perfection of His life. In the perfect and glorious purity of heaven itself, it is said that Lucifer, Prince of the Morn-

ing, self-tempted, fell into the sin of pride, and from thence into open rebellion against his God and King, and that one-third of heaven's host fell with him. We know that in the pure, unsullied Paradise in which the perfect Adam dwelt, sin found its way, and brought him ruin, body and soul. If holy spirits sinned amid such surroundings, what are the probabilities for one born into a sinful, corrupt, and desperately wicked world? Suppose God was to make a third man, perfect and sinless to-day, and place him in London, to live and move and have his being amid life in London as it is; to mix with men, mingle in business, and blend with society such as it is; moving in and out among the falsehoods and the frauds, the hypocrisies and general immorality of the times; to breathe our vitiated moral atmosphere, and come in daily contact with evil in all its forms; how long could the new man touch that hellish pitch without being defiled? How long would it be before that fair, clean page of life would be spotted, blotched, and smeared? How long would it be before the fine gold of that noble soul would become dim? How long before the foul feet of unclean spirits would tread the thoroughfares of that innocent heart? If Adam sinned in Eden, if Lucifer sinned in heaven, how could the third—in London—hope to escape?

And yet the man Christ Jesus was born holy, lived holy, and died holy in the face of temptations, persecutions, and testings, such as never, never assailed any human being since the world was made. For thirty years he stood the prying scrutiny of village life, where everybody is known to everybody, and to hide a fault is the barest possibility; for three years of public life, living in a light of observation fiercer than that which beats upon a throne, He was all the while, and through all His life, a perfect man, with no guile on His lips, no stain on His hands, no evil in His eye. Keenly, steadily, malignantly was He watched and followed; gazed into by the fierce eyes of priests, Pharisees, and scribes; but every eye was baffled, every tongue was dumb. All the time this peerless mortal, this perfect Jesus, was holy, just, and good.

Moses, the meekest man, was betrayed into a fit of passion. David, the man after God's own heart, was induced to stain his hand with blood. Solomon, the wisest man, was befooled by Satan into gross idolatry; and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was actuated by a spirit of vindictiveness. But Jesus—what of Him? Hark to His challenge: "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" Hark to His holy and triumphant speech: "Satan cometh"—cometh to test and try Me to the core. "Satan cometh, but he findeth nothing

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in Me"—nothing! And God Himself could say no more. John and his comrades—more clearly, more closely, more constantly than anybody else—saw this splendid holiness, this high perfection of moral beauty. They saw it in the outshining of His Godhead; and, as they veiled their eyes and bowed their heads in reverence of such purity, they said, "We saw His glory."

A further evidence of their Lord's Divinity the disciples had in the character and authority of the Saviour's teaching. The mythologies, and theologies, and philosophies of Greece and Rome, and of the old time before them—who does not know how full of error, of depravity and shame they are? Travel right round the world, and listen to the ethics of all religions from India to Peru, from Turkey to Timbuctoo, and what can you find but the human, the sensual, the vile, with here and there the bright gleam of nobler teachings and better things? The hard, rigid, and severe teachings of the Mosaic law, and the childish and impure accretions of tradition with which the disciples were familiar—how poor, how small, how mean all this was before the sublime perfection, the noble morality, the pure spirituality of the Sermon on the Mount! Surely, if the Mount of Sinai was crowned with fire when the law was given, the mount on which Jesus preached that sermon was crowned with glory—the glory of

the Father, full of grace and truth. The keenest intellects, the ripest scholars, the most skilled theologians of the day, could find no flaw, could discover no error. "Whence hath this man all this learning?" they said, as they thought upon the carpenter's cottage, and the lad at the bench, close by.

But then it was not only what He said that revealed Him as the Word, the very mind of God, but also how He said it. You know how the great teachers and prophets who preceded Him opened their mission and gave their message. Moses said, "The I Am hath sent Me;" Isaiah said, "Thus saith the Lord;" Ezekiel said, "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying;" Hosea and Zechariah said, "Hear ye the word of the Lord." But what says Jesus? See Him, as He stands before the multitude—this carpenter's son from the country; this man of no letters, having never learned. He takes all the venerable traditions of the Church, handed down through the ages from priest to priest, and scribe to scribe, and tears them to shreds. "It was said by them of old time, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say, bless them that curse you!" "I say!" That is the word of the Lawgiver; that is the dictum of the Deity. Well might the people say, in hushed and awe-struck tones, as the echoes of that sermon fell upon their ears, "He



teacheth as one that hath authority, and not as the scribes!" Once, when John and his comrades were standing by the Saviour's side, a band of brawny constables, armed with the staff of magisterial authority, roughly elbowed their way through the crowd to get at Jesus. They had orders to take Him and bring Him before the council. But as soon as they confronted Him, felt His gaze, heard His voice—"I am He!"—they fell back, turned pale and sick; and, as soon as their shaking knees would carry them, they slunk back to their employers. "Why have ye not brought Him?" said the magistrates. Because—"never man spake like this man!" No, never man spake like Jesus. John and his fellows heard His voice, and beheld His face, and in all His words and ways they "saw His glory!"

But they saw clear evidences of His Divinity in the Mount of Transfiguration, and it is most likely that this is what John more especially referred to. It was a wondrous vision. The Man Jesus stands upon the hill-top in presence of this same John, with James and Peter. Through the fleshly veil of His body the God shone out, until His face had more splendour than the sun, and the garments that He wore were bright, luminous, radiant with a lustre like the light of heaven! There He stands, a veri-

table pillar of fire, making the midnight dark resplendent, and paling out the starlight with refulgent glory. On the form of a servant He puts the coronation robes, and is at one and the same time a mystery and a revelation—"God manifest in the flesh." By His side there stand two saints from glory, princes of the olden days—Moses, the Lawgiver; Elijah, who raised it from the grave, in which it had been long buried. Both are robed in light; both are crowned with celestial honours. Satellites, these, of the Sun, who kindled their brightness by His own. Then came the Shekinah cloud, in which Jehovah did ever speak to man; the pillar of fire in the desert; the blaze that capped Sinai; the glory that sat on the Mercy-seat—that glory hovered over Jesus and the saintly pair who stood beside Him. Dazed, rapt, excited Peter wants to tabernacle there for life. Then, all at once, Moses is gone, Elias is gone, the cloud is gone, the voice is gone, the glow on the face of Christ is gone; the three men can see nothing in the shadows but the form of Jesus only. But while yet the holy glamour of that matchless vision fills their eyes and ravishes their soul, they say, "We saw His glory!"

And did they not see evidence of His Divinity in the wonderful works He wrought? Why, even His enemies were constrained to say, "No

man can do these works which Thou doest, except God were with Him." But others had wrought miracles as well as Jesus; but with what a difference! Moses was told by God how to use his staff in Pharaoh's presence so that the serpent should appear; Elijah knelt by the bedside of the lad and prayed that he might come to life again; and afterwards, when Paul and Peter do a mighty work of healing, "In the name of Jesus" is the powerful formula which they employ. But when Jesus stood by the grave of Lazarus, He said, "I say unto thee, Arise!" And when the leper fell at His feet and said, "Lord, if Thou wilt!" He said, "I will; be thou clean!" Here was the exertion of underrived authority; here was the power direct from the Fountainhead. Neither was this either a rare or a secret occurrence: it was an everyday transaction; it was done in the face of multitudes of people, many of whom would have denied it if they dared, and contradicted it if they could.

"When God came down from heaven—the living God—  
What signs and wonders marked His stately way!  
The winds brake out in music where He trod;  
Shone in the heavens a brighter, softer day.

The dumb began to speak, the blind to see,  
And the lame leaped, and pain and darkness fled;  
The mourner's eye grew bright with glee,  
And from the tomb arose the wondering dead."

“What manner of man is this?” said the disciples, on board ship; “for even the winds and the sea obey Him!” And on another occasion, as they heard the order given, “Peace, be still!” they saw the angry waves settle down into quiet ripples; they heard the raging winds die down into still music; they saw the storm transformed into a calm; and said, with bated breath, “Of a truth this is the Son of God.” They saw, too, this man Jesus in the act of forgiving human sin, which was surely most miraculous of all. “Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven!” Jesus said it. “Thy sins are forgiven! Go in peace, and sin no more!” Jesus said it; but could He do it? If He could, He is Divine. You remember how they brought to Christ one sick of the palsy. Unable otherwise to reach Him, they let him down through the open roof with the bed whereon he lay. The light of faith gleamed in the palsied face, and the heart of Jesus leaped at once in answer to such a call. “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” Keen eyes were bent on Him; quick ears caught that word! malignant minds saw an opportunity of raising the people’s wrath against Him. “That is flat blasphemy,” said they. “Who can forgive sins but God only?” “Which is easier,” said Jesus—“which is easier, to say, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee,’ or to say, ‘Arise up and walk?’”

It requires Divine power to do either the one or the other, and He that can do either can do both. "That ye may know that I have power to forgive sin—'Rise up and walk'!" Leaping from the discarded couch, the hitherto palsied wretch stood up before them, stalwart, hale and strong; shouted aloud his praises, gathered up his bed, and bounded home! John and his comrades were witnesses of the crowning triumph over sin and sorrow, body and soul, and are constrained again to say, "We saw His glory!"

Besides all this, they had the evidence of His death, His resurrection, His ascension. On all this I need here say but little. When Jesus hung upon the cross, the sun hid his face in horror, and darkness fell on all the land; the earth reeled and staggered as though it felt the blow that fell upon its Lord; and the Roman centurion, heathen though he was, could not resist the accumulating evidence of the grandeur of the Victim, but confessed, saying, "Of a truth this was the Son of God!" John saw Him die; saw His body embalmed in spices; saw Him buried; saw the stone rolled to the door, and the Roman seal imprinted there. Then came the visit to the empty grave; the appearance of the risen Lord to the Twelve as they gathered in the upper room, when Thomas touched His wound-prints, and exclaimed, "My Lord and

my God!" Then followed the final scene on the mount at Bethany. He lifted His hands and blessed them: "Lo, I am always with you!" He said; and then He rose, by His own unaided power, from earth to heaven. Enoch was not, for God took him; Elijah was fetched in a fiery car; but Jesus needed neither taking nor fetching; He simply wills to rise, and rises in sublime majesty, watched and followed by the wondering eyes of the disciples, until a cloud received Him out of their sight. Still they look, dazed and lost in wonder and astonishment, until an angel is sent to call their minds to earth again: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven?" Then the charm was broken; John and his companions looked at each other, at the angel, and then said, with bated breath and awful reverence, "We saw His glory!"

Is there any wonder, think you, that as the aged Apostle John discovered one heresy after another arising to distract the Church and to dishonour his beloved Lord, and with all this personal testimony and witness of his own to draw upon—Is there any wonder, I say, that he should come to the front, infirm and aged as he was, and boldly declare: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word was made flesh,

and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

My dear brethren, at this period of the year, all Christendom, which now includes all quarters of the world, as well as a thousand islands of the sea, keep holy festival to commemorate the birth of Christ. When the name of the Holy Child Jesus is on our lips, and the thought of the Babe in the manger is in our minds, let us remember that in that low and mean estate it was the Lord who visited His people; it was the Deity Himself who enshrined Him in human form; and that the God-Man, Immanuel, hath power—power to save, power to bring back our primeval blessedness; and that unto you—you—you—is born a Saviour, which is Jesus, and not only Jesus, but Christ the Lord! That is the hope of the world. That, and that only, is the salvation of the human race! Jesus, your Brother! Christ, your God! Immanuel, God with us! Oh, I beseech you, ponder this Christmas Gift. He is the rarest jewel—a sun which ever shines, a garden full of sweets, a hive full of honey, a star that never sets, a fountain ever full, a rose which ever blooms, a foundation which never fails, a friend that never forsakes. No mind can grasp His glory, and yet a child may feel

His grace. He is the source of all good, the fountain of every excellence! Says the aged John, He is "full of grace and truth." His lips drop like the honeycomb, His eyes beam with tenderness, His heart gushes with love. Give your hearts to Him; trust Him as your Saviour; love Him as your God. He will feed you with His hands; He will carry you in His heart; He will support you with His arm; He will nurse you on His breast; He will guide you with His eye, and warm you with His love. He is full of grace and truth!



## XXVI.

*ZACCHEUS AT HOME.*

“To-day I must abide at thy house.”—LUKE xix. 5.

SOME of you are favoured with homes and houses of your own. In them there are many comforts, even luxuries; and loving family voices, and the rippling laughter of little children, make the fireside cheery, and having enough and to spare you dwell under you own vine and fig-tree, shadowing your hearthstone with content. Others of you have a house in which sorrow and death have made painful gaps, and there hath fallen a gloom which even the spring sunshine and the lapse of time fail to lighten or to lift. Others of you have homes strait in dimensions, and in which the battle with poverty is more or less severe, and the riddle how to make both ends meet is hard to solve. Many of you live lonely, companionless, in solitary lodgings, and your house is only “home” in a very limited sense indeed. Many others have your “house and home” in large houses of business, in which the

one and only tie and welcome beneath the roof-tree, is the toil you give and the gain you get. And it may be that there are others of you whose house, however well provided, is darkened and embittered by the unkindness and cruelties of those who mock your religion, and are at enmity with your God. I often ask myself, as I watch the crowd streaming outward through the open doors of the sanctuary—Whither are they going? To what are they going? Dispersing themselves almost singly for miles around, every one of them will enter some house. What will they find there? What will they carry there? And while I breathe a prayer, "God bless them and their homes," I sigh and long for the coming of the happy time when Jesus, the honoured Guest of the Bethany household, shall be the welcome guest of every family, the cheer, and strength, and comfort of everybody's home! I commend my Saviour to you as a guest, and my prayer is that every one of you shall hear Him say as you retire to your homes, "To-day I must abide at thy house."

Come with me awhile along the highway in the near neighbourhood of Jericho. Coming through the gates of the city, behold a man stepping out at a brisk pace with excitement in his look and some set purpose in his eye. He is probably of middle age, undersized as far as

stature goes, and wearing a Jewish robe of texture and pattern denoting both rank and means. Right away along the open highway yonder, he sees a cloud of dust, such as would be raised by a tramping multitude, and, now and again, there is borne to him on the wind the united hum of many voices. At once he changes his quick walk for a rapid run, and on reaching a spreading tree, whose boughs are strong and low, he climbs well up into its branches, and hidden among its plentiful leafage, there he sits and awaits the passing of the crowd. This man interests me exceedingly. Who is he? What is he doing there? Well, it really doesn't much matter who he is; he is the receiver-general of the king's taxes, and has a remarkably good berth of it you may depend, for the story tells us that he was rich. He had "lots of money," as the saying goes, though how he came by it all is quite another thing. Now I have answered the two great questions that this stupid world considers of so much importance—Who is he? And what *has* he? But I tell you plainly that neither the one thing nor the other was of the least importance in the eyes of Him who is going to make his acquaintance by-and-by. That glorious Man of grace had just been as kind to a poor blind beggar, with scarce a coat on his back or a coin in his pouch, as ever He will be

to Zaccheus, though he is both chief and rich ! The third question is of a good deal more importance. What has brought him there ? What is the desire of his heart ?

Not, who are you ? whether chief or churl ; not what have you ? whether pounds or pence ; but what brings you here ? What is your errand ? What the desire of your heart ? If on this Sabbath morning our blessed Saviour passes by, don't forget that both Zaccheus, a rich chief, and Bartimeus, a blind beggar, were on the Jericho road that day, and that both beggar and banker got what they wanted and a good deal more. Now, then, this man in the tree, what does he want ? "To SEE JESUS, WHO HE WAS." He might have contented himself by hearing who He was ; but that would do him no more good than it does you. "Who He *was* ?" Why, the Pharisee would have said, "a devil ;" the priest, "a heretic ;" the scribe, "a radical ;" the learned, an "ignorant carpenter ;" the poor, "a prophet ;" the many, "an impostor ;" the few, "a God !" And if He had gone to the high priest, as a sort of fountainhead, *he* would have answered, "a blasphemer," and have tossed his mitred head in scornful wrath. So, instead of trusting to hearsay, Zaccheus sought to see Him, and then he calls Him Lord ! Would God that all would follow his example ! Don't be content

to ask me or any man "Who He is." Dr. Manning will tell you one thing; Dr. Martineau will tell you another thing; Dr. Adler, the chief rabbi, will give Him quite another character; Mr. Voysey and Mr. Spurgeon will have different stories to tell; to say nothing of the pitiful talk of the modern infidel. No, no, dear friend and brother, for thy sake—thy soul's sake—for the sake of my Master, my peerless Saviour and Lord, if you *can* find a sycamore-tree anywhere, climb it, for truth, and right, and conscience sake, and SEE Him, who He is! Then, like an honest doubter of the last century, who was also an honest seeker, you shall say, "O Man! my Brother; O God! my Lord."

Along the highway comes the Christ, the centre of a tramping crowd. Bartimeus, with his opened eyes, falls into the dense ranks and mingles his cry with theirs. To His disciples, immediately round Him, He speaks, as His custom was. A pair of keen eyes is watching Him from among the sycamore leaves. Passing directly beneath the spreading tree, Jesus stands with uplifted face—"Zaccheus!" I think that first opened the little man's eyes. I think that first touched his heart. The knowledge that he was up there hidden in his nest of leaves, the knowledge of His very name, the tender and familiar tone, "I must abide at thy house!"

That completed the conquest. His house, of all houses in Jericho! The people regarded him as a renegade, a traitor who fattened on his country, oppressed the poor and stooped to receive Roman pay! Why, there were people in Jericho who would turn off the causeway so as not to touch his doorstep, and spit on it and mutter a curse as they passed by.

Yet it is to his house that Jesus is coming—the publican's dishonoured and hateful hearthstone is going to receive this glorious Guest! My friends, I need not direct you to the self-evident lesson. This morning that same Jesus that passed, that looked, that said, passes again this way. To-day He knows where you sit, knows your name, knows your errand. What have you come for? Is it to see Him? Is it because you really want to *know* who He is? You have heard, nay, I make bold to say that you do believe He is to pass this way. Is it your heart's desire to see Him? Lift your soul in prayer, *that* is the sycamore that gives you a coign of vantage. Believing prayer, that is the elevation that compensates for the littleness of your stature, and enables you to see over the heads of all the crowd of dust, and things, and men, and hindrances, the Christ who comes this way. Jesus is here, in His word, in His worship, in His house, in His Spirit. Look for Him! Wait for Him!

Believe on Him! And to you as to Zaccheus He will say, "To-day I must abide at thy house."

I see these two—the sinner Zaccheus, for he is a sinner, and a great one, and the Saviour, for He is a Saviour, and a greater one. I see them enter the porch, pass the outer square, cross the threshold, and in that house Jesus is the Guest. I think I see the face of the host, a cold, hard, grasping, grinding, suspicious man, who for years has been feathering his nest, as men say, by the convenient engine of the law; oppressing the poor, overreaching the rich, handling the national gold that passed through his fingers—all of it, that is, but what stuck to them in the passing—and overfilled his bulky purse. But he is not happy; his conscience has troubled him. He has wondered whether the Nazarene is the Christ. He half hopes, half fears He is. Now He is his Guest, talking with him, looking through him, pouring light into him, until the heart of Zaccheus opens, as the flower opens to the sun. His heart opens, his eyes open, his hands open. His home has in it a Guest whose presence means power, and purity, and pity, and pardon, and peace. His heart is full of sorrow, his conscience full of conviction, his mind is full of light, his eyes are full of tears. The hours pass, the meal is spread, the spell of the Guest is working all the time. The home atmosphere is redolent with

a Divine presence, and at last Zaccheus can stand it no longer. He rises from his seat, comes by the couch on which Jesus is reclining; he folds his hand like a penitent across his breast, and says, as well as sobs will allow, as he bends his head in shame, "Lord! half my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wronged any man, I restore him fourfold." Does Jesus stand on His feet, with the light divine upon His brow, as He spreads His hands in benediction, breathes a blessing on the family, and says—Oh, how He could say it!—"This day has salvation come to this house." Then was there joy in heaven, and the very angels might have coveted lodgings beneath that protected roof, and by that consecrated hearthstone where Jesus was the Guest!

Oh, men and women, hearken to the voice of the message sent to you by my Master. He would fain be your Guest, however great the sinner, however humble the home. "*Thy house,*" He would abide in thy house. And if you seek Him, desire Him, want Him, He will say, "*I must abide at thy house.*" The holy and gracious compulsion of His tender love will force Him to thy house; and to have Him indoors, is to have Him and all that He can bring. His blessing, His light and love shall dwell with thee and thine, when thou liest down and when thou



risest up; in thy going out and thy coming in; in thy children, thy basket, and thy store. Crossing thy threshold He will say, "Peace be to this house," and His peace shall there abide. Parents! the present and the future of your children are dear to your hearts; for their sweet sakes make Jesus welcome in your home. Honour His word, speak His praise, tell His story, live His life, seek His help, ask for His Spirit, and you shall place them safely under His lasting charge. Friend, where dwellest thou? However small the chamber, there's room, for Jesus in it; however poor the fare, it will be sweetened if He breaks the bread; however solitary, either because of loneliness or because of multitude, thou mayest be, His company will give thee compensation, His presence will bring thee cheer. "To-day I must be Guest at thy house." You may take Him with you from hence, you may keep Him by you, until to-morrow becomes to-day! And if you do not open the door and bid Him go, He will never leave you, never forsake you—never! never! until the day comes when HE shall be Host, and you shall be guest, at the marriage supper of the Lamb!

## XXVII.

*THE MYSTIC PILLAR.*

“ And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud.”  
—EXODUS xiii. 21.

THE exodus and pilgrimage of the Israelites have been called a cluster of wonders, and in the whole cluster there is surely scarce a greater wonder than the pillar of cloud and fire. As the pilgrim host move slowly and steadily along their wilderness way, this mighty cloud-column stands out before and above them, riding and gliding along the sky in silent and majestic motion, the object of daily observation and the marvel of the whole tramping host—from the ancient grey-beard to the little child. Grand and imposing as it was in the daytime, in the night hours it assumed a gorgeous splendour more astounding still. I dare to say that many a time and oft it furnished food for the thoughtful inquiry and wondering speculation of those who beheld it, and to whom it was a steadfast and unfailing guide, and a convincing

token of the power and presence of their God. I would fain get you to study it now; for though it has disappeared for ever from the eyes of men, it appears to me to be an attractive and instructive picture—that wondrous cloud of the *providence of God*, which has not passed away, either from the heavens above or the earth beneath; but along all the ages and through all the years, guides the march and controls the movements of men and nations, as the mystic pillar did the people through the wilderness of old.

I have called it a mystic pillar—that cloud in the desert; and so, to them who saw it and to us who read of it, it was. Of what it was composed; by what means it was kept pillar-like and intact, while all other clouds were carried and scattered by the winds of heaven; by what strange secret force the cloud-pillar was nightly transformed to a column of bright flame?—these are questions that no doubt often exercised the minds of the spectators, only to be dismissed again as a baffling mystery that could not be explored. And, not only its nature and changes, but its direction, its movements as to time and place—they had no knowledge, could make no sure prediction. Whether it would bend to the right, turn to the left, or move straight onward; whether it

would remain stationary, or begin to move night or morning, or at noon—all this, and all concerning it, was above and beyond their knowledge; the laws that governed it and the will that led it was as entirely outside their information as it was beyond their control. What they did know was that Jehovah was the God of the cloud; what they could do was to trust it implicitly, follow it constantly, seeing in it all the while the good hand of their God over them for good.

In all this, for my learning and for yours, I see a picture—a true and instructive picture—of the providence of God. From the beginning until now, the ways of God to man have been shrouded in mystery, have exercised inquiring but baffled minds, have furnished material for the sneer of the infidel, the sophistry of the sceptic, and the logic of the merely scientific mind; ay, and have strained and tested the faith of the pious, and placed stumblingblocks before his faith, on which his foot hath well-nigh slipped.

All this arises from the fact that men *will* strive to be equal with God; that their mind will cope with that of Deity, and by their finite feebleness gauge the plans and purposes of the Infinite and Eternal Lord of all. I warrant me that among that swarming host of pilgrim Israelites, each with his own individual tastes

and judgment, each with his own individual and family interests, the doings of that cloud-pillar were criticised very freely, and often condemned roundly and in set terms, because its times and turnings did not dovetail with their interests, judgments, or pleasures. Sometimes it led through waste wild places, where the way was rough and the toil was hard; when, by bending a little to the right or left, they might have strolled along a pleasant track. Sometimes it stopped or began to move at some point in the career or fortunes of the individual that was downright inconvenient, and upset their private schemes and personal prospects altogether. And I dare say that at such times they were accustomed to say, as I often hear people say now, that it was very mysterious—"A mysterious providence," that is the way it is generally put, when some calamity occurs a little out of the common way. I remember that terrible accident which occurred on the Thames—the sinking of the "Princess Alice" steamboat. It appalled everybody, and we called it a "mysterious providence." I remember reading in the newspapers that when the collision occurred, the boat "cracked and crumbled like a match-box"—that was the sentence used. Why did it do so? Not by a special providence, but because it was built like a match-box—as slim and as

flimsy ; and the providence that ended so fatally was, as usual, not the providence of God, but the reckless greed of men. A man's child dies, and he says it is a mysterious providence ; but it was an equally mysterious providence that the child lived, for life and death are both issues under His government and control.

I think we are wrong in thinking and talking so much about the special interventions of Providence : as though it were at rest, asleep, or indifferent for the most part, but now and then springs into action to serve a purpose or to gain a point. The pillar of cloud and fire gives the truer representation. It was always there, always commanding, always controlling alike the encampment and the march—when the pillow was under their heads and when the knapsack was on their shoulders. Steadily, noiselessly, persistently, the cloud worked out the plan and providence of God. One day it led them three days into a wilderness with no water—it was a hard time that ; that was a “mysterious providence,” I suppose. Another time it led them to Elim, green Elim, with springs and palm-trees, and they lolled beneath the shelter of the palms and slept with the soothing ripple of cool streamlets in their ear—that was a “special providence,” I suppose. The fact is, it was the same wise, gracious, special, mysterious, varied providence

all the way—a providence as constant as the cloud, with one general aim,—the current guidance, training, discipline of each, and the final and ultimate good of all.

There is a good story told of Archbishop Whately that illustrates well what I mean. A clergyman who, with some others, had escaped in a boat from a burning ship, was discoursing in a large company of the marvellous favour of Divine Providence, that had so specially watched over and preserved him. A wonderful providence! A special intervention of God's goodness! "That was a very great mercy, sir," said the Archbishop, seriously, "but I can record a greater in my own experience. I once sailed across the sea in just such a ship, and bound for just the same port, and—would you believe it?—the vessel never caught fire at all!" My friends, that is the way I would have you think of, and trust in Providence, as being ever present, ever wise and watchful, and, like the cloud-pillar of Israel, ever for your real good—pursuing its Divine and gracious path. Good and bad, light and shade, joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity, things present and things to come, all are proceeding on precisely the same plan,—namely, the working of the soul and mind of God for His glory in the true well-being of His creatures, and for the ultimate advancement

and elevation of mankind. Wherever the pillar went, with whatever seemingly reasonless vagaries the pillar moved, and however widely experiences and opinions differed about its moving, we know now that it led them safe enough and sure enough to the Canaan which was the long-ing desire of every heart.

Those who stand on the same level where two great armies are engaged, can but see in them one disordered multitude, with colours blended and opponents intertwined; but viewed from some high eminence the spectator sees who's who, and discerns attacking forces and defending army, and can tell how goes the fight. Even so, men who behold the state of the Churches and the world with merely ordinary eyes of flesh and blood, dimmed by earthly mist and cloud, think all things out of order, and see nothing but confusion worse confounded. But if they ascend into the sanctuary of the Lord; if, with eyes enlightened by faith, they judge of earthly occurrences on heavenly principles; if they can but see the Hand that guides the cloud-pillar, and how, willy-nilly, all human forces are compelled to follow, they would see that the Lord of Hosts knows how to command His armies, and that—in spite of all appearances to the contrary—the battle is going well, and must end in the ultimate victory of Truth and



Right. Whatever notions you and I may have of the pillar—the evidence of God's providence that we can see—let us look from the pillar to the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Power behind the pillar, that moves the pillar, and that will bring it until it stands over the Canaan of perfect rest and eternal good. The grand question with you and me is not *how* the pillar moves, or *why* it moves in this way rather than that, but *where is it going?* Who directs its course? The answer is—it is going to my Canaan of perfect good; it is guided by the good hand of my God! Then, like Israel, let us follow its leadings, through brake and through briar, up hill and down dale, assured that

“God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.”

The mind of a pious and thoughtful artisan named Albert Thierney was much occupied with the ways of God, which seemed to him to be full of inscrutable mysteries. The two questions, “How?” and “Why?” were constantly in his thoughts, both as to the events of his own life and the government of the world. One day, in visiting a large ribbon manufactory, his attention was attracted by a large and extraordinary piece of machinery. His eye was that of a cultivated artisan, and he was immensely

interested. Countless wheels were revolving in intricate motions, and thousands of threads were twirling and twisting in all directions. He could not understand its movements, and closer study only deepened his interest and increased the mystery. He was informed that all this work and motion was connected with a common centre where there was a large chest which was kept shut. Anxious to understand the principle of the machine, he asked permission to look inside the chest. "*The master holds the key,*" was the reply. The words came to him like a flash of light. Here was the answer to all his perplexing thoughts—his anxious questionings about Providence. "Yes," thought he, "the Master holds the key; He knows, He governs, He directs all—*God!* That is enough! what need I more? 'He hath also established them for ever; He hath made a decree which shall not pass.'" Brothers mine, herein is our wisdom—the Master has the key! Your own life—its joys, its sorrows, its gains, its losses, its pains, its pleasures, its strange and often sudden variations of experience, its tears and smiles, its smiles and tears; all chasing each other in intricate and mysterious revolutions: what does it mean? The Master holds the key! The Church, the world, the nations, political strife, social earthquake, scientific revolution, com-

mercial progress or stagnation ; it is a mystery—an enigma ; it is high, I cannot attain to it ! Listen ! **THE MASTER HOLDS THE KEY !**

What, then, is the plain duty of all those who acknowledge the all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving sovereignty of Almighty God ? Unswerving trust ! Unremitting obedience to His law ; unquestioning following of the indications of His providence ; unrepining submission to His guidance as given in your conscience, through His word, by the leadings of His Spirit, and the steadfast finger-post of duty, that always points us the way in which we ought to go. And not only is this our duty, it is also our high privilege ; for to follow where He leads is to follow safety, satisfaction, peace ; to follow His leadings is as surely to reach His Canaan of final rest and joy as light follows sunrise, as fruit follows blossom, as life follows death ! Let me read again one passage from the grand old chart of truth : “ And so it was, when the cloud abode from evening to morning, and the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed ; whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried, the children of Israel abode in their tents and journeyed not. At the commandment of the Lord, they rested ; at the command-

ment of the Lord, they journeyed; they kept the charge of the Lord." Even so will we journey to the land of promise and the home of rest. In the daytime of prosperity and peace, His providence shall be our guide to show us the way, and our screen from the sun's bright but too fervent beams. In the night-time His providence shall flash a kindly light upon our pathway, temper the chill night-winds, and disperse the gloom; if we are called to toil across the sands of life, to struggle through its thorny tracts, and tramp with weary feet a stony way: or if we are permitted to encamp awhile in peaceful pastures; or are compelled to tarry in our tents, we will, nevertheless, keep our eye upon the pillar, and humbly, loyally, watchfully, mark the leading hand of God.

"Captain of Israel's host, and Guide  
Of all who seek the land above,  
Beneath Thy shadow we abide,  
The cloud of Thy protecting love;  
Our strength Thy grace, our rule Thy Word,  
Our end the glory of the Lord.

By Thine unerring Spirit led,  
We shall not in the desert stray,  
We shall not full direction need,  
Nor miss our providential way;  
As far from danger as far from fear,  
While love—Almighty love—is near."

## XXVIII.

## A GREAT DEEP.

“Thy judgments are a great deep.”—PSALM xxxvi. 6.

“THY judgments are a great deep.” Comparing this passage with others of a similar meaning, we have no difficulty in discovering that by the judgments of God is meant, not His rewards of goodness, or His sentences against evil, but His wise and perfect rule and government, His dispensations alike in providence and grace; or, as David puts it elsewhere, “His wonderful doings among the children of men.” And among the foremost thoughts to which this illustration gives rise is that of *mystery*. That wondrous ocean that occupies two-thirds of all the space upon this globe—how little is known of it! The laws that govern its motions, the unseen forces that give rise to and control its currents, the mighty breadth of its unknown regions, never explored—even on the surface—by human eye, the mighty mass of secret things, living things,

natural objects, conformations, all give point to the poet's perplexed question,—

“What art thou, awful and mysterious Sea?  
None but thy God, old Ocean, knoweth thee;  
*Thy* secrets in oblivion's dark abode  
Lie hid, unknown to all but God.”

How true this is of the ways of God! They are past finding out. His footsteps are in the great waters, trackless, pathless, printless, a mystery so high we cannot attain to it, a mystery so deep that we cannot fathom it. He who would explain to us the laws, the motions, the moods, the changes, the weird wonders of the wide ocean, must know more than man ever did know—more than it is possible for any individual man to know. Who then would be fool enough and vain enough to criticise its movements, condemn its modes, murmur at its storms, or grumble at its calms; all unknowing and ignorant of the wide sweep of its influence, and the wider sweep of the laws of the universe that influence it! But if this be true of the great deep of the ocean, how much truer is it of the great deep of Divine Providence? Who but the fool, who saith in his heart, “There is no God,” or the proud, presumptuous worshipper of his own reason, would dare to call in question or pronounce judgment on such small wavelets,

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such limited ripples, such little surges of the infinite and fathomless ocean of God's ways as he can see or understand? Still and ever we are compelled to say—

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform ;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.  
Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
And works his sovereign will.”

And wise is he and calm, happy and hopeful too, who silences the voice of reason in the presence of inscrutable mystery, and gives ear to faith—

“Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain ;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.”

“Thy judgments are a great deep.” Like the sea, they are ever working, ever active, ever in motion. Sometimes, and at some given point, the ocean may seem to be at rest ; and the summer sun may shine on what is called a sleeping sea, but even that is only comparative rest ; the motion is invisible but constant, and other portions of the same wide sea may, at that very moment, be heaving in billows or tossing in

storms. More than anything in all creation besides, the ocean, I think, is the type of tireless, continuous, and perpetual activity. And it is well for us, if we can believe in the same thing as regards the rule and government—the beneficent providence of Almighty God. It is the pulse of creation, and is always beating, even when creation sleeps. It is the engineer whose hand is on the handle, and whose eye is on the steam gauge, however the passengers may read or sleep, or deport themselves in the ship or train. It was the poor no-faith of an ancient creed, and, strange to say, it has been revived in modern times—that, having created and constructed the universe, and set it going, the Deity hath left it to run out its natural course. But this blessed book teaches a grander, nobler, and more glorious truth: “He upholdeth all things by the word of His power.” “He doeth whatsoever He will, in heaven and in earth.” “He holdeth the winds in His fist, the waters in the hollow of His hand; He taketh up,” that is, beareth up, “the isles as a very little thing.” “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” These, and a thousand similar passages, affirm that God *is*, that God *works*, that God *wills*, that God *governs*; and that constant, active, energetic, resistless, tireless as the ever-moving sea, the great deep of Divine Providence moves, heaves, ebbs, flows,



streams in ever-changing, never-ceasing currents of purpose and of power, among men and things and nations, to work his sovereign will. By its movements a nation falls or rises; by its operations a sparrow flies or falls; and in its all-embracing activities, you and I are dealt with and controlled as fully as if we alone were the subjects of His government and the objects of His care!

“Thy judgments are a great deep.” Which suggests further, that all this activity and constancy of operation is ultimately, and on the whole, healthful and beneficent. It is true, as we in our stormy island-home know well, the ocean, oftentimes wrathful and angry, has proved to many—as we should think—an untimely grave; but this is mainly due to human misjudgment, human folly, and human greed. But we know that the wild commotion of storm and billow, when the salt waters are churned into a seething caldron of yeasty foam, means the charging the winds with the liberated ozone, iodine, and other health-giving elements of life; these raging seaquakes and disturbing tempests mean the keeping fresh and pure and salutary the waters that roll to every coast, the billows that lave and lap on every shore. A quiet ocean, a stagnant sea, an inactive deep, would mean ultimate corruption and pestilence, and death to the

wide world of man and beast. You and I have often watched the summer sea—smooth almost as a duck-pond, the hot sun investing its surface waters with a gold or silver sheen, and veiling it in a thin haze which the still air has not motion enough to blow away. How beautiful! would that it could always smile and shine like that! Thank God, it does not; or in a little time its smile would be the smile of death, and its shine a shine to light stricken humanity to the grave. No, no! the rough wind and the east wind, the Euroclydon and the tempestuous seas, have all their work of mercy and their errand of good; and in this, the judgments of God are a *great deep*, for its storms and tempests, its pains and disappointments, its wild waves of trouble as well as its sparkling ripples of peace, are healthful, useful, salutary, and beneficent, both to body and soul. The shriek of the storm and the boom of the wave, as well as the whisper of the breeze and the wash of the ripple on the tide of life, proclaim—"He doeth all things well."

"Thy judgments are a mighty deep." This suggests to me the thought of unchanging change. Its changes of mood, so sudden, so various, so unaccountable, seem, at first sight, to favour the idea of lawlessness, wantonness, and a freakish temper; but in all, and through all,

what fixity, what certainty ! Watch the incoming or the outgoing tide, and the playful variety of wave-force gives you the idea of haphazard, or a game of chance ; yet the tide-waiter can tell you to a decimal when the tide is at its height, or when it will reach its lowest ebb ; and in all the region of arithmetic or mathematics there is nothing more exact, nothing more certain, nothing more sure. The providential dealings of God's providence with men and nations is just like that. Events, experiences, vicissitudes, come to us and on us and over us so oddly, so strangely ; upsetting calculations, making us to feel as though we were the sport of fortune and the tools of change ; and yet, in all and through all, we are being led by a way we know not, to a definite and certain goal. "The Lord knoweth the way that I take, and when I am tried, I shall come forth as gold." Happy he who, like Job, is a co-worker with his God, in the high and holy work of making his own calling and election sure.

"Thy judgments are a great deep." That gives me the idea of floating power. The sea is very deep—very mysterious, and at times very stormy, but what a splendid water-way it is ! How grand a sight to see a well-bottomed, well-manned, well-captained vessel, floating proudly over its surface to seek some far-off shore, and gain the

precious things of far-off lands ! England is the England she is, rich and great, and powerful and prosperous, because she has learned to trust the sea. To the great deep she commits her merchant fleets by the hundred and the thousand. She crosses to the New World in these days in what are literally floating palaces ; and the white wings of her commerce are unfurled to every breeze, and her sails are floating on every sea. Yes, the great deep is a grand thing to sail on ; but not so grand as is the providence and gracious government of God. Trust to *that*, my friend and brother ; put out on that sea in the well-found keel of saving faith—the ark of God ; spread wide the sails of prayer to catch the breezes of heaven ; steer your course by God’s own sun and star ; and be you sure of this, whatever of head-winds you may meet, whatever of chopping seas you may contend with, whatever storm and gale may menace your safety or toss your craft about—that great deep will bear you up ; that Divine ocean will bear you on ; that unfathomable sea will ensure you a safe voyage. Faith never suffers shipwreck ; faith never springs a leak ; the canvas-spread of earnest prayer is never torn to shreds ; the masts of holy purpose, that ever point to heaven, never go by the board, however rough the storms ; and “so He bringeth them to their desired

haven." You remember the grand old German Hymn—

"Commit thou all thy ways  
And needs into His hands ;  
To His sure power and tender care  
Who heaven and earth commands.  
Through waves, and clouds, and storm,  
He gently clears thy way ;  
Wait thou His time, so shall thy night  
Soon end in joyous day."

This great deep, dear friends, washes the golden sands of the better country ; breaks in jewelled waves and holy music on the shining shore ; and floats the soul-bark of the Christian mariner right into the "fair havens"—the port of the New Jerusalem, whose jasper walls, and gleaming gates, and glorious towers are reflected in the crystal sea !

"Thy judgments are a great deep." That gives me just one thought more—precious things hidden in mysterious recesses, and yet to be brought to light. I have read of an old Spanish galleon being discovered on a foreign coast, half-buried in the sand, and in which was found dollars, doubloons, ducats, bars of gold, and ingots of silver—the treasure of the deep. In the government and providence of our gracious God, the Christian hath yet undiscovered treasures both of grace and glory—grace for this life, glory for the life to come ; and all

in turn, in time or in eternity, to be laid bare, or flung ashore, so that the rejoicing soul shall be enriched with riches more than earth can give and lasting as the mind. "O the depths both of the goodness and the faithfulness of God! His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways are past finding out."

## XXIX.

*THE FURNACE AND THE LAMP.*

“Behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.”—GEN. xv. 17.

AT the bidding of the Almighty, Abram left his country, his kindred, and his father's house. On the strength of the Divine promise to bless him with peculiar favour, to make him the founder of a great nation, the medium of richest blessing to the wide world of men, he snapped in sunder all the local and social bonds that bound him, and wandered into a far country a pilgrim and a stranger, not knowing whither he went.

It is not to be wondered at that in the course of his lonely exile his heart did sometimes fail him. His unsettled and uncertain life in tents, the harassing enmity of jealous and hostile neighbours, and especially the fact that he had no son, led him at times half to doubt the promise which, though distinctly made, was so strongly belied by his unrestful and childless life.

Three times had the Almighty, with His wonted grace, affirmed his glorious destiny and restored his flagging confidence with words of cheer. On this last occasion, Abram ventures to put the question to his Lord—the question still so often put by unbelief—“How can those things be?” “What *wilt* Thou give me, seeing I go childless?” You see how natural it is for poor feeble man to gauge the possibilities of Omnipotence and to limit the Holy One of Israel.

To give the halting patriarch a still more emphatic answer, his Divine Companion leads him forth from the screening canvas of his tent into the still air of that clear eastern twilight, and bids him “look towards heaven.” Overhead, the bright blue sky is studded thick with stars. Abram’s eye swept the vast expanse from sky-line to sky-line, and saw the infinite fields sown thick with golden corn; saw in every star the power of the Promiser, and heard the voice of Him who hung each blazing glory there, “*So shall thy seed be.*” Then Abram cast away the last rag and remnant of his doubt; “He believed God, and his faith was counted to him for righteousness.”

God always honours faith. Unto him that hath shall be given. He will make assurance doubly sure; and so, by means of a vision of the night, Jehovah gives His servant a clearer,



fuller, more emphatic revelation than before. Let us try to call up this strange and striking scene. Out on the broad, unpeopled desert the solitary old man builds a rude altar of rough stones, roughly piled. Hereon he lays the sacrifice which God Himself, mark you, had chosen and selected. There is a young heifer, a goat, and a ram ; these were divided asunder between the joints and the marrow, and lay in pieces, naked and open, on the spacious, rough-hewn altar Abram's hands had piled ; beside them lay a pigeon and dove, and with these the sin-offering is complete.

*Why* these particular victims were chosen by Jehovah, and not others, is a question that has exercised the fanciful curiosity of some, but there is little wisdom in it ; the one main characteristic of the sacrifice is sufficient thought for us. In every case there was an offered life, and in every case there was the atoning blood !

Having prepared the sin-offering, Abram does not, as usual, apply the lighted faggot to the pile. He sits on an adjoining hillock or rock or boulder, and will wait and watch and pray, if haply God Himself will send the fire, and so graciously accept the sacrifice.

So he watches through the tardy hours, but never a spark falls from the still heavens, and never a token comes that God is near. Mean-

while the birds of prey, the eagle, the vulture, and maybe other fowls of heaven, come circling round and attempt to swoop down upon the sacred flesh. With waving arm and upraised voice the watcher scares the unclean things away. As the day wears on, they gather round with increasing boldness, and in added numbers, until Abram himself is in peril from wing or beak or claw. Still there is no fire, no voice, no answering sign from heaven !

At length, the unequal combat and the long and weary vigil exhaust his strength, his arms are tired with incessant waving, his senses are benumbed and drooping, his heart is depressed and sore, his spirits collapse, and just as the sun goes down a deep sleep falls upon him, and a thick darkness, starless and oppressive, settles on his soul. Then, immediately, there follows this marvellous vision and the gracious voice of God.

In the patriarch's deep sleep the rude altar and the severed carcases thereon seem again to stand in full view before him. All is as clear to his mind's eye as when he was awake, though in all probability the vision reproduced them on a larger and more imposing scale. Now, however, Abram sees something more.

Among the various severed portions of the sacrificial victims, passing in and out between

them, there seemed to move a fiery furnace, with a dark-red glow at the heart of it and a black smoke-cloud above it; and just behind it, or mayhap by the side of it, or threading the narrow spaces in independent movement, there was also a burning lamp, whose clear, bright, steady flame flung a pleasant lustre on the altar and all around.

As the patriarch watched the mysterious sight in grateful and inquiring wonder—grateful, for the long-expected fire had come—inquiring, for the vision was not clear—the voice of Jehovah fell upon his ear: “Thy seed shall serve the stranger and shall be afflicted four hundred years. Then shall they come out of bondage with great substance, and shall come to this land again. Meanwhile, thou shalt live to a good old age, and shalt go to thy grave in peace.”

In this whole striking and impressive narrative there are teachings of the utmost interest and value; and I would fain extract alike from the SACRIFICE, the FURNACE, and the LAMP, guiding light and strengthening cheer for Abraham’s spiritual seed to-day.

Note, first, that Abram’s long and lonely hours of watching came to an end at last, and that patient waiting upon God obtained its due reward. You, too, may find that your offering of ardent prayer, or self-sacrificing deed of service

or of suffering, may seem for long unanswered and in vain. Yet, though the vision tarry long, still wait for it; the day may slowly die, the night may gather round before the gladdening light shall come, but it *shall* come, and turn the darkness back again to dawn.

Note, further, that from every offering to God—the song of praise, the fervent prayer, the submissive will, the good deeds, or the consecrated life—we need to drive, with watchful hand and eye, the vultures of evil thoughts and selfish aims and worldly motives and Satanic temptations away. Full often, as in Abram's case, the task may be very hard, and faith and strength and resisting power may seem to be vainly spent in failing endeavour to keep the sacrifice intact and clean. Yet, just when the ravenous birds, by reason of their rage and number, were about to overpower him, just when his arm dropped powerless by his side, and his drooping head sank upon his breast, just then the sun set, the fire came, and every vulture spread its wings and vanished in the night. Now, as then, man's extremity is God's opportunity, and still the unclean spirits which haunt and harass the Christian, even at his devotions as well as elsewhere, are scared off just as they circle round for a final swoop, and wing their baffled flight away!

Note, further, that the mysterious Furnace and the supernatural Lamp were seen in direct connection with the chosen sacrifice. They moved to and fro *upon the altar* and among the consecrated offerings, and were seen *nowhere else*. Now, see how this applies to the seed of Abraham, the Israelitish race. They were a chosen people, selected and set apart out of all the tribes of men to be, in a sense, absolutely singular—God's own people. This choice on God's part, and this consecration on theirs, was symbolised and ratified by altar sacrifices and the fire from heaven. Their *Consecration* to God brought the Furnace of *Purification* and the Lamp of *Illumination*, in order to fit them for the high and glorious destiny to which they were called.

The "smoking furnace" is seen in the famine that drove them into Egypt, and in the cruelty that drove them out again. Its lurid fires and cloud of smoke are seen in the hatred of their tyrants, in the bloody slaughter of their babes, in the wretched plight of the bondsmen amid the brick-kilns and the clay. The roar of the furnace is heard in the clank of their chains, in the curses of their taskmasters, and the groans of the slave. The smoke of the fire is seen along all their penal wanderings in the wilderness, in the spears of the Hittite, the sword of Amalek,

the bite of the serpents, and the horrors of the plague. In and out among this consecrated people the smoking furnace was in constant motion, casting sombre shadows and scorching heat around. But all the while, from the beginning to the end, the steady flame of the "burning lamp" shone bright alway. The presence, the voice, the guidance and protection of the Angel of the Covenant never left nor forsook them until the promise of God was fulfilled and Canaan became the lot of their inheritance. The lamp of light and life and favour moved ever with the tabernacle of the Lord. "In all their affliction He was afflicted. The Angel of His presence saved them and carried them all the days of old."

In the life and death of Jesus Christ, too, Abram's glorious seed, the vision was fulfilled. He also, like Abram's sacrifice, was eminently the chosen of the Lord. Of Him the Almighty speaks as "My servant, Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Jesus Himself, the priest, His cross the altar, His body the sacrifice, offered Himself without spot unto God. How clearly we can see the "smoking furnace" in the sore affliction through which He passed! You can see it in the hunger and thirst, the pain and weariness of His matchless life. You can hear

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the roar of the furnace in the taunt of the Scribe, the sneer of the Pharisee, and the howls of the mob; and louder still in His own "strong crying and tears." The furnace was heated seven times hotter than its wont when Peter denied Him, when Judas betrayed Him, when the rest forsook Him, and even His God seemed to leave Him to grapple with fire alone! Yet, ever amid all, through the whole of His sharp pilgrimage, He had ever the light and the comfort, the cheer and the guidance, of the "burning lamp." By His conscious sinlessness, His secret mountain intercourse with God, by the baptism of the Brooding Dove, by the Father's voice and presence, by saintly messengers from heaven, by perpetual gift of gracious power, the "burning lamp" of light and love moved along through all His life of sacrifice, up the hill of Calvary, through the sepulchre, and from Mount Olivet up to the hills of God!

The patriarch's vision is fulfilled, too, in the history and experience of the Church of God, the true Israel, the spiritual seed of Abraham. The Church of Christ, the guild and family of true believers throughout all the world, is also, like Abram's sacrifice, the elect of God. It is a chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, elect, precious. By holy dedication the Church lays itself on the altar of its Lord, and

offers perpetual sacrifice through the blood of the Atoning Lamb; and God says of it, "I will be their God and they shall be My people." Here, again, we see how Consecration is linked with Purification and Illumination—here, again, the Chosen *Sacrifice* is subjected to the Smoking Furnace and the Burning Lamp. The smoke of the one and the gleam of the other can be traced all along the line of the Church's march. You can see the reek of the furnace in the rage of Herod, in the cruelty of Domitian, in the savagery of Nero, the passion of the English Mary, the atrocities of Papal Rome. You can catch the reflection of the furnace-glow in the sword of Mahomet, the claymore of Claverhouse, the rocks of Madagascar, the dungeons of Naples, the stakes of Smithfield, and the Inquisition of Spain. In some form or other, to-day, the "smoking furnace" moves through the pilgrim and militant Church of Christ. But, as with Israel of old, so with Jesus, the Church's Head, the Church itself has never been without the glow of the "burning lamp." Before Festus and Agrippa it shone in the chained hands of the Apostle Paul, cheered his prison at Philippi, and gleamed on his grey hairs as the headsman's axe dismissed him to receive his crown. God's Church has never lost the light of Truth, never been robbed of the divinely-kindled lamp of



Love! At the outset it was declared, "The promise is to you and to your children, and to as many as the Lord your God shall call." That promise has never been revoked, and to-day, from Greenland to Good Hope, from Plymouth Rock right round the world to Plymouth Hoe, the "burning lamp," fed by the Spirit of God, shines on the Church with a cheerful and a quenchless blaze!

"The glorious Shekinah  
Shines brightly down upon her;  
And from the fire, she rises higher,  
In glory and in honour.

E'en from the smoking furnace  
Christ will His Church deliver,  
For Jesus' name is still the same,  
A burning lamp for ever!"

I want to extract one more lesson for personal practical application. The singular vision of Abram is equally fulfilled in the life and lot of every Christian believer. Like Abram's offered victims, the Christian, too, is the chosen and consecrated possession of the Lord. He hath presented Himself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, and in return, "the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself." And here, again, in the individual, consecration is attended by purification and illumination. The Living Sacrifice goes hand in hand with the Smoking Furnace and the Burning Lamp. In

the Christian life the smoking furnace is full often seen and felt. The path of suffering, test, and trial must be trodden by every child of God. Abraham must lift the knife above the heart of his best-beloved. Joseph must pine in an Egyptian gaol. Moses must flee for shelter from his own race and kin. David must be hunted like a partridge on the mountains. Elijah must be persecuted by a raging Jezebel. Shadrach and his fellows must pass through the fire. Paul must feel the thorn in his side. John must be exiled to wild and wintry Patmos. This Christian must carry along a painful bodily ailment. That one must go mourning because of an absent face, a silent voice, a vacant chair. Another must struggle, baffled and perplexed with temporal and financial cares, half worsted in the fight. And still another weeps over a blighted hope, a thankless child, or an unfaithful friend. Everywhere, and with everyone, the smoking furnace moves in and out along the consecrated life.

But still, in the Christian's lot the "burning lamp" holds precious and abiding place. The word of promise, grace, and guidance is with him all the way. The "candle of the Lord" burns in his heart; the lamp of eternal truth and love burns with a quenchless fire, casts a

guiding light on his heavenward path, sweeps away the mists even from death's deep river, expels the shadows from the very grave, and is reflected by the jasper walls that gleam on the hills of God! Is Abram afraid because of the smoking furnace? In the light of the burning lamp he reads, "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward." Does Paul's thorn rankle so deep that he pleads thrice with tears and sighs to be delivered? The burning lamp flings the promise on the smoke-cloud—"My grace is sufficient for thee," and at once the apostle "glories in his infirmities and praises God in the fire!" So with thee, O Christian! In thy trials thou shalt have triumphs, in thy sorrows thou shalt have solace. For thy trouble thou shalt have double; in tribulation shall come compensation, and always and ever the smoking furnace shall be held in check by the gleam of the burning lamp!

Do you ask in doubtful wonder *why* a consecrated life should be so closely linked with affliction? I answer that the furnace is the purifying agent, making the sanctification perfect and the sacrifice more precious and complete. The furnace, too, endows the consecrated soul with the properties of steel, gives the tempered hardness and solidity of character

which enables the Christian to fulfil the Apostolic counsel—"Quit you like men; be strong!" That was the end of Israel's sore distresses. "Behold I have refined thee," says Jehovah—"I have chosen thee out of the furnace of affliction." Even of Jesus it is said that He learned obedience by the things that He suffered, and that by suffering He was made perfect as the Captain of our salvation.

Take heart, then, O thou follower of the Captain. If that is the way the Master trod, should not the servant tread it still? Make thy sacrifice thorough, willing, constant, and entire. Drive off all the unclean birds of Satan, self, and sin, that would defile the altar and rob God of His own. Be ever on the watch, with prayerful heart, for gracious tokens of His favour! If the smoking furnace scorch thee, and its sombre smoke enshroud thee, so that thou, like Abram, droop awhile, lift up thine eye of faith and thou shalt see the burning lamp. By its light thou shalt see the face of thy Redeemer, shalt feel the glow of the Comforter's sweet presence, shalt hear the Father's gracious voice, and read the promise of immortality. Take this final lesson home:—Wherever thou seest the smoking furnace of trial, temptation, or affliction, thou shalt also see the brightly-burning lamp of heavenly guidance and sustaining love!

“Cheer up, my drooping brother !  
What though the smoking furnace  
May hotly glow, we surely know  
It hath no power to burn us.

Let not the smoke-cloud scare thee,  
Its red-core fill with terror—  
The scorching flame shall purge from blame,  
And purify from error.

The fires of sore affliction  
Are still the Church refining ;  
And through the camp the burning lamp  
Of light and love is shining.

Be sure the smoking furnace  
May *cloud*, but *darken* never ;  
The lamp of light divinely bright,  
Shall shine on thee for ever.”

## XXX.

*ON THE TOP OF TABOR.*

“Lord, it is good for us to be here.”—MATT. xviii. 4.

A WONDERFUL interest attaches to the mountains of the Bible! There is Moriah, where Abraham stood his fearful test; Sinai, where the terrors of the law were seen and heard; Carmel, the scene of Elijah's victory; Horeb, where the same prophet trembled before the majesty of God. On a mountain the glories of this world were unfolded by Satan to tempt the Son of Man; on a mountain Jesus proclaimed His law of Love; into a mountain He retired for secret prayer; on a mountain, so-called, He atoned for human sin; and *from* a mountain He ascended into glory. To-night we contemplate another mountain-scene—sublime, impressive, wonderful beyond degree. The daily labours of the tireless, wonder-working Jesus had ended, and, taking with Him three chosen friends and witnesses, He retires from the public eye, ascends a mountain in the early twilight, that, as His custom

was, He might hold fellowship with His Father, and obtain access of grace and power for the following day. On that hill-top, while He talked with God, and while the weary three were sleeping, this grand event transpired, and woke them into strange astonishment and awe.

I. *They had a Vision of Christ's Divinity.* Not His distinct, unveiled Godhead—that would have been an insufferable blaze; *that* Jehovah Himself hath told us can no man look upon and live. All that Moses could bear was but the after-shadow of His glory, and that only when he was hid in the cleft of the rock, screened and sheltered by the hand of God. The ancients called the sun in mid-day splendour the “*shadow of God.*” What, then, must be the glory which no man can approach unto, and before which the very seraphim have to veil their faces with their wings? But, through the fleshly veil of Jesus’ body, the Deity within was permitted to shine out, until His face shone with all the glory of the sun, and the very garments that He wore were bright with a radiant whiteness, the light and lustre of the Godhead who dwelt within! In aftertimes the aged veteran Peter speaks of himself as an “eye-witness of His majesty,” and white-haired John says, “We *saw* His glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.”

It was a wondrous vision! The Man of Nazareth standing on the hill-top, a veritable pillar of fire, making the midnight-dark resplendent, and paling out the starlight with His refulgent glory! On the form of a servant he wears His coronation robes, and is at one and the same time a *mystery* and a *revelation*—God manifest in the flesh! What an honour and a privilege was this! *Now* could the disciples say in very truth, “We have seen the Lord.” Be *ye* faithful followers of Jesus, brothers mine, and you, too, shall see the King in His beauty in the land which is afar off!

II. *They had a Vision of Glorified Saints.* Two men, Moses and Elias. Men, you see, men still, despite of death and the lapse of time. Thou too, my friend, for good or ill, will live on through all the ages. Not only men, but retaining their individuality, in form and feature as in the days of their flesh. In the life which is beyond the border, recognition and reunion are both real, and form no small portion of the joys of heaven. “Moses and Elias talking with Him.” There is no unconsciousness in the Hades where the saints of God are waiting for the final glory. Disembodied mind is not laid in the bonds of sleep. If Moses and Elias were there talking with Jesus, then Noah and David



and Daniel were somewhere else, engaged in holy service or delight. As we look upon the two saintly visitors from the world of spirits, and upon the three disciples of our Lord, we see the Church above and the Church below linked together by the Lord and Saviour of them both. What means the presence of Moses and Elias there? Moses was the giver of the law. Elijah raised it after long and dreary burial amid idolatry and sin. Moses represents the Law, Elijah represents the Prophets, and they are there, that holy night, to show that law and prophecy led up to Jesus—culminated in Jesus; that the old dispensation, of which the noble pair were forefront figures, was merging into the new Gospel dispensation, in which this self-same Jesus is all in all!

Look at these two men, as they appear "in glory"—the garments of the royal house. All the murmurs of Israel, all the rebellions and ingritudes that vexed for years the righteous soul of Moses, are of small account to him now; all the hatred of Ahab, all the jealousy of Baal, all the vengeful anger of Jezebel, matter very little to Elijah as he stands robed in the glory that excelleth. The care, the cloud, the cross, the conflict—all are gone, gone for ever from them both, and instead they have an everlasting dwelling-place in the joy of their Lord. My

friends, be ye but true and faithful followers of Jesus, and with you, too, the fret and pain, and tears and troubles that mar your brief to-day shall by-and-by die out for ever in the presence of the glad to-morrow in the lands of God. These light afflictions are but for a moment, beyond—just beyond the border-line lies the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

III. *They had a Vision of the Father's presence.* There came a cloud and overshadowed them; not an ordinary cloud, but the bright Shekinah-cloud, in which Jehovah did ever manifest His presence—the medium through which He ever made His communications to a favoured few. It was the pillar of fire that shone on Israel's nightly march, the blaze that capped Sinai when the law was given, the radiant web of light that sat upon the Tabernacle, the glory that filled the Temple—this was the Divine effulgence seen by Peter and James and John, this was the cloud divine which overshadowed them! They had seen somewhat of its shining as it brooded dove-like above the brow of the baptised Jesus on the banks of Jordan; they will see it again above the mount of ascension when it “receives Him out of their sight;” now they see it brightly lustrous, above the equally bright and lustrous form of Jesus,—it over-

shadows THEM, too, as well as Him; it overshadows the two saints whose errand brings them from behind the veil, as well as them. It overshadows US as well as both, for in Jesus, the central figure on the hill-top, the Fatherhood of God spans all whom Christ redeemed:—Moses—Elias—Peter—thee—and me! with the light of life, the light of love.

“Still glows o’erhead that living gleam,  
And still the lambent lightnings stream;  
Where’er our Christ is, there are they;  
In every heart that gives Him room.  
They light His altar every day,  
To kindle zeal, and sin consume,—  
To comfort and to cheer, they come!”

This bright overspreading mystery awed and terrified the watching three. They feared as they entered into the cloud, yet when fully in it they heard the Father’s voice. So many a time and oft, when some mysterious cloud of care or apprehension settles round us, we fear and shrink and tremble, and then rejoice to find our Father in it after all!

IV. *They saw a Vision of Jesus only.* This, I think, was the chief end and aim of this great event. There, on the lonely hill-top stand three trembling, sinful, ignorant men, seekers after truth, trained from infancy to trust in Moses, to reverence prophecy, to offer sacrifice, to follow

the guidance of priest and scribe and teacher of the law. They have just had glimpses of God, glances into mysteries: they are on the threshold of a wonderful revelation. They want to build three tents and dwell there and hearken and learn! All at once Moses is gone! Elias is gone! The cloud is gone! The voice is gone, even the glow on the face and robes of Christ is gone! The night-wind moans, the dark shadows gather thickly round; the three men scan the hill-top with a searching eye and see nought;—no man—**SAVE JESUS ONLY!** Him they saw, the meek and gentle Nazarene. But in Him, their Friend and Fellow, they saw all! **THAT** is the central lesson of this marvellous vision—everything superseded by Jesus, Christ all-sufficient! The law dies out, except as issued through His lips; sacrificial fires are quenched for ever; Moses vacates his seat; the priesthood flits off the stage of being like a white-robed ghost; the altars are overthrown, ceremonial and ritual have no longer place; Elias is silent, for Prophecy's occupation is gone,—**JESUS ONLY!** All else fades away, dies out! The Christ is come! There He stands upon the hill-top, the One Hope of the world; the One Teacher sent from God; the One Power to redeem; the fruit of all the dispensations, the culmination of all the providences of God, the fulfilment of all the prophecies, the crown of all

the ages,—the Saviour of all mankind ! Jesus only ! Look unto Him and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.

Having considered what the three disciples saw, let us consider for a little what they heard.

I. *The Voices of Moses and Elias.* The two visitors from Paradise held converse with Jesus, and the subject of their conversation was the “decease” of Christ, or more properly His exodus or departure out of life. Not one word is said in this narrative of all the words the saints did that day utter, but it may well be supposed that they referred to the prophecies, spake of His coming sufferings, soothed Him for the conflict, and reminded Him of the glory that should follow. They bring Him messages of love and cheer from their sainted comrades in the spirit world ; they tell Him of the welcome they are preparing for Him, when, the cross being borne, and the passion being ended, and the victory being gained, He should ascend to take possession of the throne ; and, above all, they remind Him of the multitudes of souls His death would save, and the ineffable joy and satisfaction He should feel when He saw the glorious results of the travail of His soul. “They talked with Him.”

And do you not think that HE talked with

them ? Did He not tell them of His unswerving purpose ? Did He not send back by them tender messages of assurance and of love ? We know nothing of what passed ; but I am sure of this herefrom, that men in heaven are interested in the affairs of men on earth ; that saints in glory are still concerned in the life and death of believing ones below. I like to think of the great cloud of witnesses who are looking on, the while we fight the battle and run the race—of special witness, special interest, in individual cases—the mother watching the life-march of her son, the friend whose heart beats warmly still for friend. They spake of His decease,—the passion of Gethsemane, the Cross of Calvary, the Easter triumph, the ascension from Mount Olivet. That was the absorbing topic on the plains of Paradise ; that was the grandest theme into which the angels desired to look ; that subject, more than aught else, engaged the counsel of the plotting fiends in hell ; that was the vital matter that brought the Shekinah-voice of God into the discussion ; that—O men and women, the sufferings, death, and victory of Jesus—is the one, supreme, essential business for you to ponder on, to think on, to speak about—for that to you means life or death, salvation or damnation, heaven or hell.

II. *Now hear the voice of Peter.* Peter's

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voice was generally heard first among the little band of disciples. He was a child of impulse, but, withal, a grand transparent soul. The three, says the record, were heavy with sleep ; in all likelihood not the physical sleep of weariness, but a dreamy oppression of the senses in the presence and under the influence of such a sight. Strengthened and recovered to cope with the wondrous revelation, Peter says, "It is good to be here." I wonder, since that glorious night upon the hill-top, right away down the centuries to this hour, how many pious souls have said that—in the gracious refreshings of the sanctuary, in the holy, sweet retirement of the closet, in the sick chamber, in the dying triumph—"It is good to be here." The Lord's Mount Tabors, where prayerful saints gain vision of a transfigured Christ, are found everywhere, even in a prison, and may be, if your heart is willing, where you are now. "Let us make three tabernacles," says Peter. Only three, you see ; they could be well content to take their lodgings all unsheltered if the three were housed. The more a man comes under Divine influences, the more he ignores and forgets himself. Our danger, fellow-Christian, is in taking too much thought about our own more easy shelter, and too little for the tabernacle in which our Lord may dwell. Peter forgets the comrades left in the valley down below, however ;

forgets how much the people in the plain are needing the healing mercies of the Master. He does not know of the poor lunatic lad, with whom the devil is making sad work down below, and whom a heartbroken and tearful father is bringing to be cured. There are many Christians who, like Peter, are dearly fond of privilege. High on the glorified mountain-top of sweet devotion, they can sing: "My willing soul would stay in such a frame as this;" but this will not do. You must follow the Master down the mount again, for the sinful and the needy sigh for help, and duty must be done.

III. *Now hark to the voice of God.* "This is My beloved Son, hear Him." This was the Father's unmistakable *seal and sanction* concerning the mission of His Son. The same voice was heard on Jordan's banks while the waters of baptism glistened on His brow. It was heard again in the temple when Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify Thy Son." "I have both glorified it," said the Voice, "and I will glorify it again." Now He glorifies Him again. The first Voice was for His baptism, the second was for His preaching, the third is for His passion; and the holy echoes follow Him even to the cross, and brace Him for the mighty battle that redeems a world. Moses, that self-same prophet now with Him in the cloud, had



prophesied, two thousand years before, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me; Him shall ye hear." Now Jehovah brings the two prophets together, and emphatically cries, "This is **HE**; **HEAR HIM!**" Here again we see the main object of the whole transfiguration scene—*Hear Him*. Moses sinks into silence; Elias is for ever dumb; Prophecy has no more a voice. *Hear Him!* Let human wisdom hold its peace—human phantasies and fancies, philosophies, theories, moralities, hush their vain delusive voices for evermore! *Hear Him!*—the **PRIEST**, who says, Believe in **ME!** *Hear Him!*—the **PROPHET**, who says, Learn of **ME!** *Hear Him!*—the **KING**, who says, Follow **ME!** Oh, my brothers, **HEAR HIM!** Life from the dead is in His Word, and immortality!

IV. *Now, finally, Hark to the voice of Jesus.* I want you to realise the position of these men. Overwhelmed with fear and awe and dread; smitten into dumb and trembling silence by the strange vision and startling voices of the night; dazed and dazzled by that glimpse into the Godhead and the mysteries of the spirit-world—"they fell on their faces and were sore afraid." Sinful man had never been able to come into contact with the Godhead without that collapse of soul, that desperate dismay. Job says, when

the Lord speaks out of the whirlwind: "Behold, I am vile. I abhor myself in dust and ashes." Isaiah, seeing the glory in the temple, cries, "I am a man of unclean lips." And this same Peter, in presence of Jesus when His word filled the net with fish, cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Now, beneath the great Shekinah cloud, and in the presence of Christ's outshining of Divinity, the trembling, fearing, conscious three "fell upon their faces, and were sore afraid." *And Jesus touched them.* That was human; that brought them back to a sense of Jesus' brotherhood. Divine, He might be—*was*, no doubt; but He was still the man Christ Jesus; and through the man they need not fear the God! And He said, "Arise, be not afraid!" That was HUMAN; that was comforting; that was the essential lesson of the whole. They had heard the voice of God, speaking in mystic thunder from the cloud; they had heard the voice of disembodied saints, speaking in the dialect and tone of angels and the seraphim—now they hear the word of Jesus, the same loving, tender, sympathising, compassionate Jesus. HIS voice was music, and HIS word was LOVE! To me that is the grandest, dearest sentence in the whole sublime majestic story. Be not afraid—the law of Moses has no power to condemn—the fire of Elijah has no

power to burn—the voice of God has no terrors to alarm. The touch of Jesus, the word of Jesus—this is our *life*, our *peace*, our *hope*, our *heaven*! To you, Jesus is all in all. Jesus only! Jesus alway! Jesus *now*!

“Jesus only! Jesus only!—all my ransom paid,  
Lifts my burden, as He sayeth, ‘Rise, be not afraid!’

“Jesus only! Jesus alway! When in sin I laid,  
Jesus touched me, Jesus bade me, ‘Rise, be not afraid.’

“Jesus only! Jesus ever! When death doth me invade,  
He will touch me, He will bid me, ‘Rise, be not afraid!’”

THE END.

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